

**Gender, Patriarchy and Resistance:
Contemporary Women's Poetry in Kannada and Hindi (1980 – 2000)**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
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THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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I hereby declare that the work presented in this dissertation entitled **“Gender, Patriarchy and Resistance: Contemporary Women’s Poetry in Kannada and Hindi (1980 - 2000)”** is original and carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Ravi Ranjan. I further declare that this work or any part of this has not been submitted for any degree here or elsewhere.

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For

Amma

She let her dreams float in my eyes.

INTRODUCTION

Prelude:

When I was a little girl Amma always insisted that I do well in my studies. Amidst all kinds of restrictions, she had struggled hard to acquire education and become an independent woman. Amma used to tell me how difficult it was for her to go to Medical school wearing her nine-yard *saree* in a traditional way. She did not have a petticoat. She used to make one by putting her father's *dhoti* on a jute thread. *Amma* would go to her friend's house, redo her *saree* in the way that was common among young people in those days and then attend classes.

I remember my days in Bangalore as a girl coming from a small town trying to cope with peer pressure. As well as making an effort to adjust to different situations outside the house, I had to face lot of opposition and restrictions within the family especially when I wanted to switch over to modern outfits and from studying sciences to non-conventional arts subjects. Like modern dresses, subjects such as Journalism and Literature were also associated with something that would malign 'goodness' in girls.

Situations have changed, the opposition, the embarrassment and the humiliation women face when they make attempts to move towards 'modernity', have also changed. Whenever women attempt to deviate slightly from the prescribed ways of behaviour, they are criticized and seen as 'unwomanly'. It is true that situations have changed along with the advent of 'modernity'. Old

barriers are either broken or changed but new markers of femininity are put in its place to regulate the social behaviour of women in our society. But women are not passive subjects. They have always tried to contest the dictates of patriarchies. While the restrictions aim at confining women within the walls of domesticity, time and again women have resisted against such confinements.

I

The Beginning

Plenty of work has been done comparing literatures of Indian languages with the literatures in English or comparing works of one Indian author with another author from the English language. There are works in Kannada and Hindi comparing two or more literary works or writings by two or more authors from the same language area. Though there are umpteen numbers of studies that have come up in the area of Comparative Literature and in contemporary poetry independently, not much work has been done on contemporary women's poetry. Comparative Literature is expanding and developing in many parts of the world where it is explicitly linked to questions of national culture and identity. With this backdrop, this work in Comparative Literature on Contemporary Women's Poetry, discussing questions related to gender, patriarchy and resistance gains significance.

Contemporary women's poetry opens up debates related to literature and women's point of view in a patriarchal society. Therefore women's writing is not

only a part of literature but also an area that captures the nuances of the experiences of a specific community in a distinct society.

The period selected for research is the post eighties, i.e., 1980 to 2000. This study has two important dimensions. Firstly, this work on contemporary women's poetry draws attention to women's voices by considering women's writing not just as any literature but as a tool resisting oppressions put forth by the patriarchal society. Secondly, it is an attempt to incorporate this area of study under the larger umbrella of Comparative Literature. The work becomes significant for these reasons.

This dissertation intends to analyse poetry by women from two languages, i.e., Kannada and Hindi. The Kannada women poets are located in Kannada language vicinity whereas the Hindi women poets are located in the Hindi belt, i.e., in case of Hindi, poets are from a range of Hindi speaking areas. Women's poetry in Hindi is identified from those cultural centres where women's writing can be appropriated, tolerated, and/or from an environment that would allow women to write. Though Kannada and Hindi represent two different geographical spaces, in our opinion it is possible to compare poetry of one State/language with the poetry from another language moving beyond the boundaries of the State, because an approach like this will help in understanding the various reactions of women from different parts of the country. We believe that this kind of a comparison also helps in knowing whether the problems addressed in the writings by women in relation to questions of gender, patriarchies and resistance were

similar. The differences that arise, while surveying the poems from Kannada and the Hindi, are region and culture specific. But the similarities that emerge obviously pronounce that similar reactions might have come up from other Indian languages as well.

This research contributes to the field of women's writing by reopening debates through contemporary women's poetry. It also contributes to the field of Comparative Literature by adding in new methodological possibilities in this area for research. The methodology is proposed by bringing in essential tools from feminist studies, post-colonial studies and cultural studies under Comparative Literature. This accommodates to understand women's poetry as an academic project and also a particular social formation.

II

Tracing Trajectories in Comparative Literature

This section introduces the methodology adopted in this dissertation. It begins by tracing the trajectories of Comparative Literature and outlines the changes that came about in the approach of the discipline. Then it introduces Comparative Literature emerging as a discipline in the Indian context. This chapter also locates the area of study, i.e., the contemporary poetry by women under the Comparative Literature discipline, where a methodology is drawn by

bringing in feminist studies, post colonial studies and cultural studies, the three strands of thought under the larger umbrella of Comparative Literature.

Comparative Literature as a discipline provides us a framework to discuss various literatures across cultures and languages. Over a period of time the approaches and perspectives of this discipline have changed. Ever since its inception, scholars have come up with different definitions of Comparative Literature from different perspectives. Let us first look at a few definitions of Comparative Literature. According to Franciose Jost,

Comparative Literature represents a philosophy of letters, a new humanism. Its fundamental principle consists of the belief in the wholeness of the literary phenomenon, in the negation of national autarkies in cultural economics, and, as a consequence, in the necessity of a new axiology.

.....Comparative Literature represents more than an academic discipline. It is an overall view of literature, of world of letters, a humanistic ecology, a literary *Weltanschauung*, a vision of the cultural universe.¹

However, there are writers who understood Comparative Literature as some kind of world religion. The underlying suggestion is that all cultural differences disappear when readers take up good works. Art is seen as an instrument of universal harmony and the comparatist as one who facilitates the

spread of that harmony. According to William Posnett initial concern of Comparative Literature is:

...to compare one author with another, one literature with another,
the literature of one period with that of another, one literary genre
with another, literature itself with the other arts.²

It is understood mostly as binary studies, i.e., study of two authors, two books, two languages, literatures of two nations, etc.

In the essay, 'General, Comparative and National Literature', Rene Wellek and Austin Warren note that the classical definition of Comparative Literature lies in the study of oral literature.³ Comparative Literature is also identified with the study of literature in its totality, with 'World Literature', with 'General' or Universal Literature. For example, Paul van Tieghem notes that, movements and fashions of literatures that transcend national lines are studied by 'General' literature, while Comparative Literature studies the inter-relationships between two or more literatures.⁴

Comparative Literature is defined as the examination and analysis of the relationships and similarities of the literatures of different peoples and nations. The comparative study of literature is compared with the comparative study of religions. We see little evidence of it before the 19th century. '*Weltliteratur*', the term coined by Goethe means approximately, literature that is of all nations and peoples, and which by a reciprocal exchange of ideas, mediates between nations and helps to enrich the spirit of man. This spoke of 'world literature'.⁵

Comparative Literature is also seen as a discipline that can transcend the frontiers of single languages and national literatures. For a comparatist, any literature is basically a literature that has to be studied with reference to other literatures, generally on a bi- or monolingual or national basis.⁶

All these definitions indicate that Comparative Literature was initially understood as something that had evolved towards the attempting of a kind of universal literature. In other words, it was an ideal practice where literature was understood as something that transcended all values and barriers. For example, as Henry Remak points,

Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country and the study of relationships between literature on one hand and other areas of knowledge and beliefs such as the arts (e.g., painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, social sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression.⁷

Initially European and Euro American literature were considered as 'World Literature'. However, later the expression, 'World Literature' represented broader views. A major change in the perception of the discipline can be seen when Rene Etiemble in his article, 'The Crisis in Comparative Literature', made a plea for the expansion of Comparative Literature beyond its original European and

Euro American contexts, and against all provincialism and chauvinism. He argued that the current theoretical effort is to cope with this need to “de-Westernize” the framing concepts of literary life, which an expansion beyond the European and Euro American cultural systems entails.⁸ Jean-Marie Carré maintained that Comparative Literature is a branch of literary history. Paul Van Tieghem had declared that,

A clear and distinct idea of Comparative Literature supposes first of all a clear and a distinct idea of literary history of which it is a branch.⁹

In this way the concept of Comparative literature confined within certain meanings as the literature of nations, literature bound to languages, literature limited to its author, etc., saw a significant shift.

Fokkema Douwe deserves a special mention here. He brings in a new paradigm of cultural relativism to Comparative Literature. Cultural relativism as he says “refers to a moral stance which may influence the scholar in his selection of research methods and theoretical positions.”¹⁰ Cultural relativism proposes that all truths are relative to the individual and his/her environment. All ethical, religious, political and aesthetic beliefs are truths that are relative to the cultural identity of the individual. He observes that Comparative Literature focuses on the historicity of the literary text, that is to say, the specific circumstances under which it is produced and received. In studying texts in different languages and from various cultures, it makes use of the outcomes of linguistics, semiotics, aesthetics, sociology and psychology.¹¹

The concept of the universality of literature or the belief that there exists a single world literature prevents one from considering the differences that cannot overcome the cross-cultural barriers. Though Cultural Relativism stresses on the contrasts in different cultures its unqualified application to epistemology stops us from analysing the otherness of a foreign culture and closes the most important space where such otherness provides condition for meaningful communication.

Yet another shift in Comparative literature was brought in by the introduction of systems analysis. The Russian Formalist Yury Tynjanov considered to be the initiator of the systems approach made it clear that "literature" is both autonomous and heteronomous, i.e., that it is both self-regulated and conditioned by other systems.

Polysystem analysis was introduced to the discipline by Andre Lefevere, one of the important theorists of Comparative Literature. According to him, the concept of system allows us to describe power in its various ramifications.

If a society can be described as a system, it will consist of different subsystems, such as literature, medicine, law, each with its own discourse. The literary system inside a society is controlled on the basis of a poetics by those we shall call "rewriters", i.e., translators, the critics, historiographers and anthologizers of literature. A *poetic* then is a code with which a literary system operates, which sets the parameters for the writing of literature and to a certain extent also the discourse on literature, in a certain society at a certain time.¹²

These systems are put into force *by force*. Vast, diffuse and nearly anonymous “deciding groups”, establishments of power, in so elaborating the perimeters and structures of a language, define our ways of thinking and behaving and our norms of value: the individual has no say and neither does that sentimental construction called “the people”.¹³

Even-Zohar used the term ‘polysystem’¹⁴ to define the aggregate of literary systems, which include both ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms of literature in a given culture. By this he meant the ‘canonised’ forms of literature such as poetry and the ‘non-canonised’ forms of literature such as children’s literature and popular fiction in a given culture. He says that various heterogeneous systems are hierarchised within the polysystem. The hypothesis of Even-Zohar’s theory is the dynamic stratification within the polysystem. The (dynamic) synchronic strata of the system constitute the struggle between various strata and the victory of one stratum over another constitutes a change on the diachronic axis.¹⁵ Due to these movements, phenomena are driven from the centre to the periphery and phenomena may push their way into the center and occupy it. Therefore, there is no one center and one periphery in the polysystem. In polysystem, several things operate simultaneously. Certain things may be transferred from the periphery of one system to the periphery of an adjacent system within the same poly system, and it may or may not move to the center of that system.¹⁶

Reference to the cultural analysis made in the context of analysis of literature, gave altogether a different dimension to the ‘literary analyses’. Edward Said is one of the important scholars of Comparative Literature who has worked

in the area of cultural analysis. In the process of evaluating what “Orientalism” is, Said discusses the relationships between literary culture and other areas in a society, which is an important aspect of comparative literature. He talks about how certain notions are built around certain disciplines to segregate them from their varied possibilities. He says, too often literature and culture are treated as if they are politically, even historically innocent. He says,

no one has ever devised a method of detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere act of being a member of a society.¹⁷

Therefore, society and literary culture has to be understood and studied together. Changes in the comparative literary study approach came along with the changes that emerged in literary studies in general.

The Development of Comparative Literature in India

Comparative Literature in the Indian context is made interesting due to the shared values and cultures as well as the differences that exist in the multi-cultural and multi-lingual Indian societies. Emergence of Comparative Literature as a discipline in India encompassing these multi-cultural and multi-lingual characteristics is directly related to the formation of the Modern Indian Languages in 1954 and the post-colonial period. Ganesh Devy suggests that Comparative Literature in India is directly linked to the rise of modern Indian nationalism,

noting that comparative literature has been ‘used to assert the national cultural identity’.¹⁸ Swapan Majumdar one of the important comparatist opines,

In India, the emotional upsurge corresponding to the nationalist movement drove us beyond the narrow confines of one’s regional literature and taught us to appreciate the beauty of our neighbouring literatures.¹⁹

The first full-fledged department of Comparative Literature was brought into existence in 1956 at the Jadavpur University. This also is the first of its kind in the whole of Asia.²⁰ Amiya Dev in his article ‘Towards Comparative Indian Literature’ notes that,

Comparative Literature is the only method for working out pedagogy of Indian Literature. There is no Indian Literature as such. There are only Indian Literatures and Comparative Literature is the methodology to approach them with.²¹

In India too in the initial stages of Comparative literature it was a framework to study literatures and was mostly binary in its approach. Indian scholars did a great deal of research in comparing two texts, two authors, one element with the other, etc. Though text and context plays a major role in such analysis, text as a part of literature is foregrounded before all other aspects and therefore the context is de-focused. Comparing an Indian text with English or a European text itself can be understood as an attempt to elevate the position of ‘Indian Literature’ in the global context.

Therefore, when Comparative Literature consolidated itself in India as a discipline, research projects like comparing works of ‘regional’ writers of a particular language with the works of western writers became a popular practice. Showing commonalities between the two was an attempt towards the seeking of a universal position. Translations played a major role in giving comparative literature the required interdisciplinary dimension. Research in the area of Comparative literature in India is also intended towards binding literatures of various Indian languages, which the scholars thought to be useful to invoke the category of Indian Literature. Thus the Comparative study of literary texts from two or three different Indian languages also gained popularity. This again was an attempt towards strengthening the concept of ‘Indian’ literature, which worked towards a belief that literatures in India from all Indian languages shared a common political and cultural history.

In India, Comparative Literature was seen more as a tool that could protect the very purpose of literature. Sisir Kumar Das one of the renowned scholars of Comparative Literature noted that –

...it is more important to visualize Comparative Literature’s relationship with other literature departments. The most important issue before us is not the study of Comparative Literature for its own sake, but the study of literature itself, which has become stereotyped and subservient to vested interest of academic critics obscuring its main purpose.²²

Thus, while arguing for Comparative Literature, Sisir Kumar Das says,

I shall try to argue the case for a new orientation in the teaching of literature which is relevant to the immediate social needs of the people as well as a reflection of our increasing awareness of the power and value of literatures of other cultures.²³

When Comparative Literature started as a discipline in India the 'power and value of literatures of other cultures' referred mainly to English literature and other European literatures accessible through English language and Western culture. Comparative Literature worked towards protecting the identity of Indian literature, which was being threatened by English literature. Therefore, Comparative Literature was understood as a shield to resist the threat of the dominance of 'other cultures' on 'our culture' or to fight the power of English. The concept of 'Indian Literature' itself emerged along the lines of formation of the Indian identity. The 'Indian self' had to be released from the colonial identity. Be it the case of literature or any other area, always attempts were made to forge an Indian identity.

Aijaz Ahmad in his article *Indian Literature*, while putting forward the colonial hangovers attached to the study of 'English Literature' in India looks into the complications associated with the category of 'Indian Literature'. He says,

The difficulty in thinking of an 'Indian' literature lies in the very premises that have often governed the narrativization of that history, which has (1) privileged High Textuality of a Brahminical kind to posit the unification of this literary history; or (2) assembled the history of the main texts of particular languages (in

a very uneven way) to obtain this unity through the aggregative principle; or (3) attempt to reconstruct the cross-fertilization of genres and themes in several languages, but with highly idealistic emphases and with the canonizing procedures of the 'great books' variety, with scant attempt to locate literary history within other sorts of histories in any consistent fashion.²⁴

Ahmad proposes Literary Study, which would be a sub discipline of a much broader and more integrated Historical and Cultural Studies.²⁵ He stresses on the importance of our bi- and monolingualities and highlights the relation of literature with other areas of studies like Philosophy, Anthropology, Religion, Economics, History, etc.²⁶

In a way seeking for a universal position is to overlook or erase the prevailing differences. Whereas now recognition of differences within cultures gains importance. National identity is brought into question. New colonial identities are projected. Differences are recognized through comparative analysis in the course of particular cultural histories pertaining to women's life and writings.

Like many other disciplines, Comparative Literature also witnessed methodological changes and paradigm shifts in the last century. This can be clearly viewed in the sessions at various International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) Conferences. Sixth Congress at Bordeaux (1970) offered programmes on European Asian and European African literary relations. The

Seventh Congress of ICLA at Montreal and Ottawa (1973) among other things offered segments that dealt with issues of literary periodization, literary movements, and zones with methods of analysis that included the anthropological, sociological and formal. For example, structuralist, semiotic, stylistic and intermedia like film and radio were incorporated with values and valuations and with pedagogy. A generous numbers of sessions were allotted to intercultural relations that included the American Literatures at large (Latin American, Canada, US), intra American aspects, for example the Black, Native American and the Chicana. The sessions also focused on the European American aspects. The Twelfth Congress at Munich (1988) was important for tightening the focus on theoretical questions associated with the spaces and the boundaries of literature representations in literature, and on the pragmatic and institutional realities of criticism and teaching.

In due course, with the emergence of new schools of thought such as Post-Structural and Post-Colonial Studies, Cultural Studies and the advent of Feminist Studies, one can see a general shift in the focus of research in the field of literature. Along the lines of these shifts in the field of literature one can see the approach to and understanding of Comparative Literature also developed progressively. As a result, today we have a varied picture of comparative literary studies that changes according to where it is taking place. Sussan Bassnett defines Comparative Literature as a discipline that involves the study of texts across cultures; it is interdisciplinary and is concerned with patterns of connections in literature across both time and space. In the advent of post-colonial studies, Bassnett observes new interests emerging in the areas of Comparative Literary

Studies. She sees the post-colonial studies as 'Comparative Literature under yet another name'.²⁷

There is a clear change as far as literary studies are concerned today. In place of textual analysis of the earlier kind that foregrounded the formal aspects of the text such as their characterisation, style, form, language, etc., literary criticism today is more concerned with the contexts of meaning. As Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly points out,

Everyone knows that all narratives are to be read in the context of a specific time and place but we must remember that while the narratives emerge out of a culture, they also contribute towards the construction and definition of this culture. Stories and communities are thus bound together in a symbolic relationship.²⁸

Therefore, literature emerging within a culture is moulded by the components of that culture and in turn it contributes to the development and understanding of that culture.

Translation is yet another important component of Comparative Literature. The give and take relation between Kannada and Hindi is a vast area open for research. Whatever gets translated either way has been mainly writings by male authors and mostly in prose. Poetry by women in the vicinity needs to be explored.

Towards Contemporary Women's Poetry

Experiences that are common among women or any other group will essentially bring them together. But differences continue in their cultural practices, social status and thereby in their expressions. Their perception of the world is formed principally on the basis of these differences. We need to take note of these differences that occur due to time and historical practices. Therefore, the analysis of texts by women writers in the Indian context demands one's attention towards various local factors and the social milieu in which these writings are rooted. The socio-political developments have always been in favour of patriarchies. Patriarchies²⁹ are social organizations characterized by the supremacy of the father in the family. They lead to legal subordination of wives and children and tracing of descent through the male line. While answering to 'Some Questions on Feminism and its Relevance in South Asia', Kamala Bhasin defines patriarchy by saying that,

The word 'Patriarchy', itself means the rule of the father or the patriarch. It refers to a social system where the father controls all members of the family, all property and economic resources, and makes all major decisions. Linked to this social system is the belief or the ideology that man is superior to woman that women are and should be controlled by men, and are part of a man's property. This thinking forms the basis of many of our religious laws and practices, and explains all those social practices, which confine women to the home, and control their lives. Our double standards of morality and our laws, which give more rights to men than to

women, are also based on patriarchy. Now when one uses the word patriarchy, it refers to the system that oppresses and subordinates women in both the private and the public sphere.³⁰

At every given point of time patriarchies derive modes of control to sustain supremacy. Catherine Belsey notes that, 'the degree and the effectiveness of patriarchal control seem to have varied from one historical moment to another'.³¹ Women's resistance to the executions of the patriarchal practices also vary with changing situations. Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha's analysis of Muddupalani's *Radhika Saanthwanam*,³² provides us insight not only into the reconstitution/reconfiguration of patriarchies in history but also provide a framework for the study of women's writing in India.

While discussing Nagaratnamma's efforts to reprint Muddupalani's *Radhika Santwanam*, and the ferocity it has created, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita examine the whole enterprise of women's writing in India, which raises a number of questions that frame literary production and consumption today.

These include questions about the *contexts*, structured and restructured by changing ideologies of class, caste, gender, empire and nation, in which women wrote, and the conditions in which they were read; questions about the *cultural politics* that determined the reception and impact of their work; questions about literary taste and the literary curriculum; questions about resistances and subversions, the strategic appropriations, in brief,

the *engagement* that characterizes the subtlest and the most radical of women's writing.³³

What is important and what is unimportant in a culture depends on those who define what that culture is. For generations' together, certain texts are acclaimed as representative texts from particular literatures. With reference to such canonization, Jane Thompson says that, generations of professors and critics who make their living by them (the texts) are responsible to sustain their popularity. She says that these people are the mirrors of culture as culture is interpreted by those who control the literary establishment.³⁴

As said earlier, the nature and practices of patriarchies and their ways of control change in time. This research identifies forms of patriarchies through the resistances represented in contemporary poetry by women in Kannada and Hindi.

Along with feminist studies and post-colonial studies, the theoretical space opened by cultural studies allows me to understand contemporary poetry/writings by women in Kannada and Hindi not just as part of contemporary literature, but also as products of a specific community in a distinct society. In a lecture, 'The Future of Cultural Studies' given in 1986, Raymond Williams stated that,

...you cannot understand an intellectual or artistic project without also understanding its formation; that the relation between a project and a formation is always decisive; and ... the emphasis of Cultural Studies is precisely that it engages with both.³⁵

While working on such a research project, if the methods of cultural studies are integrated, the realm of analysis broadens. Cultural Studies allows understanding literature, both as an academic project as well as a particular social formation. Incorporating the cultural studies position allows studying literature beyond various conceptual boundaries. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan in an introduction to their book, 'A Cultural Studies Reader', specify cultural studies as a re-examination, a re-negotiation, and a re-interpretation of major enlightenment and humanist ideals, especially with a contemporary temperament of sustained critique.³⁶

Cultural Studies also allows questions of cultural identity vis-à-vis the roles played by citizens in these societies. These roles are influenced by gender, class and caste factors. Therefore, the issues that arise in any given social context are interrelated; none of these issues can be singled out or compartmentalized, or read in discreet units. Cultural critique provides a spectrum of approaches to questions that are raised in today's global, multi classed, multi caste and multi cultural societies.

According to Simon During:

The new mode of cultural studies no longer concentrated on reading culture as primarily directed against the State. Mainly under the impact of new feminist work at first, it began to affirm 'other' ways of life on their own terms. Emphasis shifted from communities positioned against larger power blocs and bound together as classes or subcultures to ethnic and women's groups

committed to maintaining and elaborating autonomous values, identities, and ethics.³⁷

More recently, the role of the citizen, specifically, gender, class and race (or caste) of the citizen have come into play in the methodological analysis of culture. This in turn has resulted in re-examination of a largely male Eurocentric worldview.³⁸

Cultural Studies is coming up with a growing body of texts concerned with previously marginalized areas, such as the works of women and ethnic minorities and ‘unacademic’ subjects such as Television, advertisements, pop music, as well as the once taboo field of diverse sexuality. Henry Giroux has rightly said that,

Cultural Studies has given a new twist to the political and personal, (since) the conservative backlash has attempted to reverse many of the gains made by women, gays and lesbians, ethnic and racial minorities, and other subordinated groups who have organized (themselves) around a political identity.³⁹

Thus, while studying poetry by women from Kannada and Hindi I have attempted to draw upon some of these recent developments in the field of Comparative Literature. I shall historicize and contextualise contemporary women’s poetry in Kannada and Hindi and attempt to foreground the ‘social meaning’ of poetry. This will facilitate the questions of gender, patriarchies and resistance that emerge in contemporary women’s writing. I feel that comparison

contributes to the analysis of literature as cultural production and contributes towards the understanding of poetry not as mere language but as discourse. Antony Easthope, while discussing the conventional positions of poetry criticism, in his book demonstrates how poetry is a discourse. He specifies that,

The meaning of the text is always produced in the process of reading. It is in order to bring a necessary stability to this process conventional criticism of poetry treats the poem in relation to the supposed intensions and personality of the author. By this it is reading poetry not simply as language but with the implicit assumption that it is a certain kind of discourse.⁴⁰

While looking at the writings by women writers, I have tried to perceive gender as an important factor over many other aspects of literature. As gender is a social construction, it allows me to look at the writings by women not just as part of literature but also as products of a male dominant society. This facilitates the raising of questions regarding changing patriarchies and identifying the mode of resistance shown by women towards it.

The scope of this study is also limited by its period, genre and methodology. This study intends to discuss women's poetry written after the eighties of the last century in Kannada and in Hindi, because, the question of 'cultural identities'- linguistic, gender, religious, regional, caste have emerged as an important agenda both in Indian politics and academics since the 1980s. This Indian context sparked off interesting debates on the idea of nation, development, modernization, class/caste, gender, etc. We see a great deal of writing from

various communities surfacing in the post eighties. This development is also represented in literature, especially in *Dalit* and women's literatures.

The post eighties or the contemporary period is a period where crucial changes can be seen in women's writing/poetry in Kannada as well as in Hindi. Placed in a post-colonial situation, women's poetry has undergone colonization, both from outside and within the Indian literary context. Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford have rightly said that there is a parallel in the relationships between man-woman, the empire-colony or colonizer-colonized. This has often been cited in postcolonial theory as the "double colonization"⁴¹ of women in colonial situations. In a colonised situation women are already under such kind of "double colonisation". Along with other colonised citizens, they not only undergo oppressions executed by the colonisers but also are targeted by the local patriarchal power structures who are fighting against the colonisers but execute their powers on women within the given situation. Women suffer under both colonial and local power structures simultaneously, I feel, they undergo "multiple colonisation". Women's writing in India may be seen as resisting such kind of "multiple colonisation" within a larger literary context which is highly patriarchal.

The anthologies I choose to discuss have been published between 1980 and 2000. Though issues addressed in these anthologies are interrelated, certain aspects are identified as dominant strands. Accordingly, I would like to identify certain concerns as some of the major themes of contemporary women's poetry in Kannada and Hindi. They are as follows:

- The question of domesticity.

- The question of female sexuality.
- The question of women's positioning in society.

The above-mentioned compartmentalization allows me to discuss specific issues of contemporary women's poetry in Kannada and Hindi and is resorted to in order to project clearer frames because domesticity and sexuality lead to the positioning of women within the family and the society.

Through a detailed reading of poetry texts of contemporary women writers in Kannada and Hindi, I shall forward the hypothesis that, similar situations might have emerged raising similar responses in other Indian language literatures as well; in the context of women's poetry - in relation to gender, patriarchies and resistance because, women writing represents resistance to the patriarchal structures and hierarchies embedded in the cultures that define them as individuals and their roles in specific societies.

In this dissertation while looking into the questions raised by the contemporary women poets in Kannada and Hindi, I shall also pay equal attention to a close analysis of the texts. I shall discuss not only the major themes but also the way in which these themes are articulated in contemporary women's poetry in Kannada and Hindi in their social contexts.

The translations of poems and quotations from Kannada and Hindi into English are mine, unless otherwise mentioned. I have made use of already available translations by others as well. References of such translations are given in the endnotes. I am grateful to all the translators whose works were of immense

help in the making of this dissertation. I have used accepted transliterations whenever they were available and transliterated on my own, when required. Collecting material for the period preceding the contemporary women's poetry was not an easy task. This holds good for the contemporary period as well.

The vast area of research on women's writing and an urge to document women's expressions and experiences, are to be understood as a conscious effort by women to create spaces for themselves from which they would be able to view the world with their own perspective. This research on the contemporary poetry by women is a humble attempt on these lines.

III

The thesis is organised into six chapters, including conclusion. The first chapter, Introduction, has three parts. The first part briefly introduces the thesis, its contents and the intention of the work. The second part traces the trajectories in Comparative Literature discipline. It reviews the development of Comparative Literature in India and then proposes the methodology for Contemporary Women's Poetry. The last part delineates the chapterisation of the thesis.

The second chapter titled as 'Women Writing: Creating a Space for Themselves', reviews the relationship between women's writing and the literary histories and establishes how the mainstream literary histories have successfully marginalized women's writing.

The third chapter, 'The Literary – Cultural Background of Contemporary Women's Poetry', offers a different way of periodization of the history of literature which can accommodate women's voices and views. Women's poetry from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary period is discussed under this periodization. This chapter broadly deals with the literary and cultural background for contemporary women's poetry in Kannada and Hindi.

The fourth chapter, 'Reading through Prefaces', draws attention towards the structure and composition of the poetry anthologies. It notes how the 'forewords' by male writers and critics written in the collection of poems by women read women's experiences within the frames of femininity and work towards constructing literary canon for women's poetry.

The fifth chapter entitled 'Major Themes' has three subchapters namely Domesticity, Sexuality and Women's positioning in society. Under these three recurring themes, contemporary women's poetry from Kannada and Hindi are discussed. Sixth and the final chapter offers conclusion of the thesis and further indicates potential areas of research in the field of Contemporary women's poetry.

¹ Franciose Jost. "A Philosophy of Letters", *Introduction to Comparative Literature* New York: The University of Illinois, 1974, p. 29

² H.M. William Posnett in his book called *Comparative Literature* published in 1886 talks about the discipline, as cited in Nagendra. ed. *Comparative Literature*. New Delhi: University of Delhi, 1977, p. 1

³ Rene Wellek and Austin Warren. "General, Comparative and National Literature", in Wellek, Rene, and Austin Warren. eds. *Theory of Literature*. New York: Penguin Book, 1978

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Cuddon, J.A. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1977.

⁶ Nirmala Jain. "Comparative Literature: The Indian Context", in Amiya Dev and Sisir Kumar Das. eds. *Comparative Literature Theory and Practice*. Shimla: IAS and Allied Publishers, 1988.

⁷ Henry Remak. "Comparative Literature: Its Definition and Function", in Newton P. Stallknecht and Horst Frenz. ed. *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective*. Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961.

⁸ Rene Etiemble. *Comparaison n'est pas raison. La crise de la litterature comparee*. Paris: Gillimard, 1963. *The Crisis in Comparative Literature*. Trans. Geprges Joyaux and Herbert Weisinger. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1966. as qouted in Gillespie, Gerald. "The Internationalisation of Comparative Literature in the Second half of the Twentieth Century", in Nemoianu, Virgil. ed. *Multi Comparative Theory, Definitions, Realities*. New York: New York Council on National Literatures, 1996, p. 21

⁹ Franciose Jost. "A Philosophy of Letters", 1974, p. 25

¹⁰ Fokkema Douwe. "Cultural Relativism Reconsidered: Comparative Literature and Intercultural Relations", *Issues in General and Comparative Literature – selected essays*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 1987, p. 1

¹¹ -----, "Comparative Literature and the New Paradigm", *Issues in General and Comparative Literature – selected essays*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 1987, p. 64

¹² Andre Lefever. 'Systems Thinking and Cultural Relativism', *Essays in Comparative Literature*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 1988. (A poetics consists of two components: one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, symbols, prototypical characters and situations; the other is a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be in a society. This concept plays an important part in the selection of themes which must be relevant to society for a work of literature to be noticed. p. 47

¹³ Frank Lentricchia as quoted in *ibid.* p. 44

¹⁴ Itamar Even-Zohar. *Polysystem Theory*. Poetics Today. (Special issue devoted to papers by Even-Zohar). 11:1 Spring 1990

¹⁵ Synchronic and Diachronic are the terms derived from linguistics. Synchronic linguistics views a particular state of a language at some given point in time, whereas the Diachronic linguistics views the historical development of a language. Thus, on the Diachronic axis we can go back and forth in time, watching the language with all its features change. When Even-Zohar uses these concepts in the polysystem theory, applied in the analyses of cultures, he brings in certain modifications by saying that, synchrony cannot and should not be equated with static, since at any given moment, more than one diachronic set is operating on the synchronic axis. Therefore, on the one hand a system consists of both synchrony and diachrony; on the other, each of these separately is obviously also a system.

¹⁶ Jayasrinivasa Rao. *Translation and Transformation: The early Days of the Novel in Kannada*. A Ph. D dissertation submitted at the CIEFL. Hyderabad, 2001, p. 85

¹⁷ Edward.H. Said. *Orientalism*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1991, p. 10

¹⁸ Sussan Bassnett. *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishes, 1993, p. 5

¹⁹ Swapan Majumdar. "Indian Dimensions", *Comparative Literature – Indian Dimensions*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 1987, p. 14

²⁰ ibids.

²¹ Amiya Dev. "Towards Comparative Indian Literature", in Chandra Mohan. ed. *Aspects of Comparative Literature - Current Approaches*. New Delhi: India Publishers and Distributors, 1989, p.35.

²² Sisir Kumar Das. "Muses in Isolation", in Amiya Dev and Sisir Kumar Das. eds. *Comparative Literature Theory and Practice*. Shimla: IAS and Allied Publishers, 1988. p. 5.

²³ ibid.

²⁴ Aijaz Ahmad. "'Indian Literature': Notes towards the Definition of a category", *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 244 – 245

²⁵ ibid. pp. 281 – 282

²⁶ ibid. p. 281

²⁷ ibid. Bassnett quotes from the opening statements of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* where the term 'post-colonial' is defined as *the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through*

which this is constituted. She concludes, "What is this but comparative literature under another name." pp. 9-10

²⁸ Meenakshi Mukherjee. "Narrating a Nation", *Indian Horizons*. Vol 40. Numbers 3-4. New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1991, p. 19

²⁹ <http://www.ciaonet.org/book/opello/glossary.html>

³⁰ Kamala Basin and Nighat Said Khan. *Some Questions on Feminism and its Relevance in South Asia*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986

³¹ Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989, p. 3

³² Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. 'Empire, Nation and the Literary Text', in Tejaswini Niranjana, P. Sudhir and Vivek Dhareshwar, eds. *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1993.

³³ *ibid.* p. 215

³⁴ Jane Thompkins as quoted in Andre Lefever. 'Systems Thinking and Cultural Relativism', *Essays in Comparative Literature*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 1988, p. 43

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan, eds. *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*. New York: Longman Group Ltd., 1995, p. 3

³⁷ Simon During, ed. *The Cultural Study Reader*. London: Routledge, 1993, p. 15

³⁸ *ibid.* p. 4

³⁹ Henry A. Giroux. *Post-Colonial Ruptures and Democratic Possibilities: Muticulturalism as Anti-Racist Pedagogy*. Cultural Critique 1992.

⁴⁰ Antony Easthope. *Poetry as Discourse*. London & New York: Methuen, 1983 (emphasis is mine)

⁴¹ Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford. eds. *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing*. Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1986

WOMEN'S WRITING: CREATING A SPACE FOR THEMSELVES

“We had a game in our house called “setting the table”.... Forks to the left of the plate, knives and spoons to the right. When a knife or a fork dropped to the floor, that meant a man was unexpectedly coming to dinner. A falling spoon announced the surprise arrival of a female guest. No matter that these visitors never arrived on cue, I had learned a rule of gender identification. Men were straight-edged, sharply pronged and formidable. Women were softly curved and held the food in a rounded well.”¹

- Susan Brownmiller

This chapter introduces some of the issues that need to be discussed in the light of women's writing. It introduces literary movements and the place given to women and their writing in the context of these movements. Then it examines how the histories of literature marginalize writing by women.

It is not out of place to state that the woman's body is a site of embarrassment, oppression, pain, destruction and disgrace in a male dominated society. But, at the same time it is also a site that initiates resistance. In other words, one can say that women's bodies are women's identities. The complex relationship between a woman, her body, the prescribed social norms, the language that inscribes and represents these norms in societies and literatures remains problematic and crucial. Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous emphasize that,

women historically limited to being sexual objects for men (virgins or prostitutes, wives or mothers), have been prevented from expressing their sexuality in itself or for themselves. If they can do this, and if they can speak about it in the new language it calls for, they will establish a point of view (a site of *difference*) from which phallogocentric concepts and controls can be seen through and taken apart, not only in theory, but also in practice.²

Resistance by women takes various forms of expression and comes up in their lives and in societal productions like art, literature, speech, and different modes of popular culture. Women's poetry is one of them. Consequently, poetry becomes important not only as an art form but also as a form that provides space for resistance. Therefore, in this dissertation I have considered contemporary poetry by women to locate issues of gender, patriarchies and their resistance of patriarchy. This research is a humble attempt towards understanding the subtleties of oppression and the gendered relationships bestowed on women in today's society.

The twenties to the early fifties of the twentieth century was a period of reformist movements. During this period, women's writing was prominently seen in Kannada, Hindi and many other Indian languages. Women edited and published magazines, which carried articles by women containing creative writing as well as discussions of issues related to women. Francesca Orsini, who maps the success of Hindi in creating a regional public sphere in north India, observes that women's journals and literature were also crucial in raising questions about the family and

about women's status in the family from new angles. Most importantly, they argued for the need to acknowledge individual emotions as well as duties, something that received a great deal of attention in the new genre of social novels.³ An ideal 'Indian womanhood' always represents the duties of a loyal wife, caring mother, supportive sister, etc. Obedient daughters were celebrated in literature while the self-assured were relegated to the margins of culture. Women writers of the period highlighted the importance of women in family and in society. In the process, as they brought out the problems faced by women to the forefront, women writers constructed the notion of a 'new woman'. Their writings and ideas are available in the literatures and magazines written and edited by women during that period. They reveal certain important aspects regarding new kinds of subjectivities constructed by women. These subjectivities were composed of special qualities like courage, boldness, patriotism and dedication to the nation as concerned citizens. Women moulded new subjectivities for themselves through their writings. This was very important for them, as it gave them an opportunity to represent themselves as citizens of a new spiritually strong nation. The 'ideal Indian woman', in turn, represented this spiritual strength. The concept of '*Arya Mahila*' the Aryan woman, portrayed by Tirumalamba in Kannada and Mahadevi Verma in Hindi, talked about the notion of the self-dependent strong woman dedicated to her tradition yet not simply a shadow of the man. Women's writing can be read as a resistance narrative shaped under the prevailing patriarchies. Women writers aware of the plight of women in the society raised their voices against injustice. They were active in the social and literary realms.

The late twenties to early sixties was a period when women's writing came up significantly. This was the period when magazines like '*Karnataka Nandini*', '*Sanmaargadarshi*', '*Veeramathe*', '*Saraswathi*', etc., in Kannada and '*Grihalaksmi*', '*Streedharpan*', '*Chand*', in Hindi, edited by women writers became popular. In Kannada, literary works that centred round the problems of women and argued for women's education were extensively produced. But male writers disagreed with the ideas propagated by women writers and women resisted the arguments put forth by men regarding their writings. In an article written in the 1920s, Tirumalamba clearly states that men had 'incomplete knowledge about natural structure and character of woman's mind'⁴. She criticizes male writers for their opinions regarding women's progress and pitfalls.

Women writers attempted to make their voice heard in the public sphere through their writings. They participated in literary conferences and spoke for women in public. For example, Smt Gauradevi Inchalmutt presided over the women's session at the Kannada Literary Conference held in Gulbarga in 1949.⁵ In her presidential address she compared the state of her contemporary women to the women of the *vedic* age and observed that 'there was a sharp decline in literary pursuits due to the changed status of women's education'. Women writers were aware that gender was a social construction and this is reflected in their literature as well. They never considered literature as an entity independent from society.

Literary History and the Women Writers

Many critics have observed that the Modernist movement in the European literary tradition was “male centred” and “patriarchal” in its orientations. In “Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality”, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out that,

A number of male modernists react against the voices of evil, they associate with a contaminating feminisation of culture, for they fear that “the whole generation is womanised; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it’s a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age.”⁶

Few women writers have been included in the high modernist canon. The modernist movement that set certain standards of ‘excellence’ for others in creative writing in terms of style, form and language has successfully excluded women from the literary realm. A similar “masculine” trend is traceable in the modernist literary movement in other Indian literatures (despite the obvious difference in contexts and assimilations). The Modernist poetry that preceded contemporary women’s poetry of the post nineteen eighties, believed that with its specific qualities and special use of language, literature has a unique ability to express the knowledge given by other disciplines in its own way.

The ‘*Navya*’⁷ or the modernist movement, of the late sixties in Kannada too was highly patriarchal. Influenced by the literary modernism of the European literary tradition, *Navya* emerged in a very big way in Kannada. *Navya*, a highly self-centred

literary movement emphasized on the complex literary expressions of the intricate personal experiences of the writer. *Navya* poetry is overloaded with themes of disillusionment, alienation and pessimism about modernity. It naturally did not have many woman writers in it, as the realities dealt with by the women writers were different. They mostly continued to write novels and short stories during this period.

Literature enjoyed the highest status during the modernist era which no other discipline had till then occupied in the Kannada socio-political scenario. The modernist phase was the most popular literary phase in both Kannada (*Navya*) and in Hindi (*Prayogvaad*, *Nayi Kavitha* and *A-Kavitha*). The main thrust of the Modernist poetry in Kannada and Hindi is similar. Both considered literature as something special and autonomous. Literary modernism ruled the intellectual scene with an imperialistic approach and embodied experiences of the male world. The modernist writers enjoyed a unique status in the socio-political realms of the society. It represented a different ideology, which also marginalized women's questions. Male writers moulded language, imagery and presentation to suit their expression and marginalized the social questions raised by various writers, including women, in their texts dominated the poetry scene especially during this period. The established critics in Kannada, for whom issues related to women were of no great significance, did not consider women's writing as serious writing but criticized women for their inability to write 'good poetry'. Modernism politically celebrated liberal democracy. It stood for 'high culture' as proposed by Eliot, Pound, and Leavis. Modernism also highlighted the individualistic experience of the middle-class male and the aspirations and ideologies of the Indian educated middle class. This research further examines the

forms of resistance offered by the post eighties women's writing in Kannada and Hindi to the preceding modernist, patriarchal movements.

After the eighties, the social situation in India began to change. Various literary movements like the *Bandaya*, *Dalita*, *Yuva Kavita*, *Janwadi Kavita* began to emerge. The oppressed groups like women and Muslims started writing. Questions of patriarchies and gender discrimination began to be prominently raised in women's poetry and started deviating from the mainstream after *Navya* and *Nayi Kavitha*.

The *Bandaya* (The Rebel) and the *Dalita* (The Oppressed) movements followed the *Navya* in Kannada. Writers who initiated these two movements in Kannada focused on women's issues in their writings as one of the issues addressed during the period. However, here the class and caste always prioritised gender. Though writings by women received sufficient attention these movements did not specifically focus on women poets. From the late eighties, women poets in Kannada are seen prominently voicing the issues related to gender discrimination and patriarchies. Sa. Usha, Pratibha, M R Kamala and H L Pushpa are a few poets to name.

In the case of Hindi, the *Prayogvaad* or the Experimentalist poetry movement started by Ajney had two women poets, Shakunta Mathur and Kirthi Choudhary. But they did not have a separate identity. *Nayi Kavitha* (the New Poetry) was a further development of *Prayog Vaad*. The *A-Kavitha* movement that criticised the class/ hierarchical social structure followed this. The poetry of

this period highlighted the life of the economically poor and the marginalised. This movement had a highly pessimistic attitude towards life. Mona Gulati is the only woman poet associated with this movement. Anger, disillusionment and an intense longing for death are some of the special elements of the short-lived *A-Kavitha* movement. This was followed by the *Naxalwadi* armed struggle of 1967 giving birth to the *Yuva Kavitha* (poetry by the new generation) movement. This movement enabled the marginalization of modernist trends. In the early eighties, with the leftist tendencies of the *Yuva Kavitha*, poets started writing with a democratic spirit, which in turn gave birth to the *Janwadi Kavitha* (Poetry of the Masses) movement. Several women poets associated with this movement and later influenced by the feminist movements have been constantly demanding for identification separate from the mainstream. Katyayini, Anamika, Sumathi Ayar, and Archana Verma are a few among them.

Women raised questions in relation to their subjectivities being constructed and portrayed by the dominant groups. Though the changes that appear have to be read in relation to Indian Nationalism and the developments that followed in the later years, we need to note that this is the time when the representation of identities emerged in a significantly definite way. This is a period when various social groups such as women, *dalit*, linguistic and religious minorities were questioning the all-pervasive notion of Indian Nationalism in literature. It was against this background that various oppressed identities and literary movements like the *Bandaya*, *Dalita*, *Yuva Kavita*, *Janwadi Kavita*, women's writing, Muslim writing, etc., emerged predominantly as new trends in Kannada and Hindi.

Literary Histories: The Marginalizing Gestures

In this part of the chapter I shall attempt to show how literary Histories written by men have failed to recognize women writers' contribution to literature. In his essay on Modern Kannada Literature and the Common People, D.R.Nagaraj talks about how the concerns of modern Kannada literature are drawn from the upper caste apprehensions and thus the plight of the common people remains as a mere sympathy. He points out:

Most scholars of Navodaya literature perceived the common man's reality i.e. poverty, to be the everlasting truth. Such a perception may invoke sympathy about the common man's state of affairs. They never realized the paradoxical extremities of advocating oneness of humanity to a society based on inequality.⁸

The category of common man for whom he argues precisely excludes women. It is an argument for the lower caste, economically backward but obviously for the men belonging to these categories.

Another important critic Kirthinatha Kurthakoti's work on the History of Modern Kannada Literature⁹ has one whole chapter dealing with the emergence of modern Kannada poetry in the late nineteenth century. He starts with the form '*Bhavageete*', the lyric, its development in Kannada and moves on to say how the new form of poetry silently emerged in Kannada and later appeared in its full form in B.M.Srikanthaiah's '*English Geethegalu*'¹⁰. Then he moves on to mention certain important literary establishments like the '*Geleyara Gumpu*'¹¹ in Dharwad that led to the flourishing of Kannada poetry. He also talks of '*Taliru*' and '*Kiriya*

*Kaanike*¹², two important anthologies of poetry published in Mysore. The chapter carries a lengthy discussion on the poetry of Bendre, K.V. Puttappa and K.S.Narasimha Swamy. He discusses romantic poetry as well as writings by progressive writers. This is followed by Kurthakoti's discussion on modernist poetry wherein poems by Gopalakrishna Adiga take the forefront. Here he mentions the names of various other poets, renowned and less known and their contributions to Kannada poetry. This Chapter on 'Kannada Poetry' that runs for about 75 pages, i.e., pages 51 to 125, nowhere mentions even a single woman poet at any point. The contribution of women to Kannada poetry scenario is completely ignored and kept in the dark. The reason for this is made clear in his other book, '*Nuuru Mara Nuuru Swara*' (A Hundred Trees, A Hundred Voices) published in 1998. '*Nuuru Mara Nuuru Swara*'¹³ is Kirthinatha Kurthakoti's another voluminous book comprising of sixty articles on various aspects of Kannada literature. It has a two-page article on 'Literature and Feminism'. The author believes in the dichotomy of qualities attributed for men and women, *Purusha* (man) – *Paurusha* (the valor) vs *Sthree* (woman) – *Sthairya* (the patience). His analysis works within this traditional framework that ascribes set qualities for men and women. In this article though he agrees that there are umpteen numbers of women writing in Kannada, he points out that –

The basis of truth now is its machoism. If it has to be the basis of tolerance, history will have to change. It really makes sense only when women do something men cannot.¹⁴

According to Kurthakoti at this point of time where history is associated with men and their valour it is impossible for women writers to make their point. Though he agrees that there is an attempt by women to write his preconceived notions

regarding their capabilities holds him from considering their writings as important.

The 1999's special issue of the Kannada magazine, '*Prajaavaani*', carried an article on 'Women's Poetry in Kannada'¹⁵ written by G.S.Amur, a well-known Kannada critic. This article gives sufficient details about how male critics directly associate femininity with poetry by women. Amur has demonstrated how the expectations of male critics direct the mode of women's poetry. According to him influenced by such expectations women poets tend to exaggerate their femininity and have ended up writing 'bad poetry'. Though he does not mention anything in particular, for Amur there are certain 'bad' elements in women's poetry. Later in 2001, he writes an elaborate essay on '*Modern Kannada Poetry*', in his book in English titled '*Essays on Modern Kannada Literature*', published by Karnataka Sahithya Academi in 2001. Here, Amur reserves one single line at the end of the article to mention poetry by women in Kannada and it says,

Another post Navya development is the emergence of women's literature which is related to other protest movements. This movement has produced some fine poets...¹⁶

He concludes his statement on women's poetry by listing a few names of contemporary women poets. This attitude of male critics is an example of how women's poetry in Kannada is considered as something not worthy of discussion by the scholars of the History of Kannada Literature and how they marginalize women's poetry by considering it simply as a product of one more protest movement. Thus poetry by women is seen and is set against mainstream poetry comprising of only male poets whose poems are represented as 'the Kannada

Poetry’. When it comes to the writing of the History of Literature to be published by the distinguished intermediaries like Sahithya Academi the women poets get censored. What is projected to non-Kannadiga readers in the form of literary history says nothing about the vibrant women’s expressions in modern Kannada poetry.

The literary scene in Hindi is not very different. In Hindi, ‘*Kavita Ki Sangat*’¹⁷, a highly acclaimed critical volume by Vijay Kumar published in 1995 does not recognize even a single woman poet. The critic has written a special chapter on Hindi poetry of the eighties. This is a period where women’s poetry takes a different trajectory and voices itself in a major way. But the author remains silent over such a vibrant new development in Hindi language. Likewise, ‘*Hindi Saahitya Ka Doosara Itihas*’¹⁸ (A Second History of Hindi Literature), by Bachchan Singh published in 1996 has a special chapter on contemporary poetry titled, ‘*Aadhunikavaad aur Navya Pragativaad (Janvaad)*’ (Modernist and New Progressive Movements) wherein he discusses the poems by Leeladhar Jagori, Chandrakanth Devtale, Binodkumar Shukl, Kumar Vikal, Arun Kamal, Manglesh Dabral, Ashok Vajpeyee, Uday Prakash, etc., at length and mentions many other men writing poetry. Not a single woman poet gets mentioned in this chapter. As a response to such indifference shown towards women writing, Suman Raaje writes a book titled ‘*Hindi Sahitya Ka Aadha Itihas*’¹⁹ (The Other half of the History of Hindi Literature), published in 2003, in which she discusses exclusively women’s writing at length. Suman Raje in her article on ‘Contemporary Women’s Poetry’²⁰ specifically mentions that great critics in Hindi, writing on contemporary poetry like Vishvaambar Naath Upadhyay and Vishwanath Prasad Tiwari and others

have never considered poetry by women important. She points out that if the critics think that the poetry by women is limited and not up to the mark, they should consider the poems at least to prove this instead of ignoring.

Literary histories in Kannada and Hindi have seen women's writing as a homogenous category and thereby have failed to recognize the existing diversities. Women's relationship with men, other women and their immediate surroundings vary due to various reasons. Their caste/class background and regional identities that come up in their writings remain unnoticed. Without taking all these into consideration, literature by women are simply seen as one category that could be granted the last few pages in a literary history. Rewriting histories and rethinking about women's writing becomes an important engagement in the post eighties.

¹ Susan Brownmiller. *Femininity*. New York: Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 1984, p. 13

² As noted by Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Writing the body: towards an understanding of lecriture feminine', in Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt. eds. *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*. New York: Methuen, 1985, p. 87

³ For more details regarding the Hindi scenario see Fransesca Orsini. *The Hindi Public Sphere-192-1940. Language and Literature in the age of Nationalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 243 – 308

⁴ Sheshagirirao, L.S., ed. *Srimathi Nanjanagudu Tirumalamba Jeevana Mathu Sahitya*. Bangalore: IBH Prakashana, 1987 p. 32

⁵ Smt Gauradevi Inchalmutt's presidential address was published in 'Saraswathi', a Kannada magazine edited by R. Kalyanamma. Vol.28, Issue.5, May 1949.

⁶ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. 'Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality', in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989, p. 83

⁷ 'Navya' or the literary modernism ruled the intellectual scene with an imperialistic approach and embodied experiences catering to the male world. Individual seems to be the center of expression and concern about serious threat to individuality was the central theme. The poetry scene especially during this period was dominated by men.

⁸ D.R. Nagaraj. "Aadhunika Kannada Saahithya matthu Saamaanya Manushya", in Nagaraj, D.R. *Amrutha Matthu Garuda – A collection of Critical essays on Modern Kannada Literature*. Bangalore: Directorate of Kannada and Culture, 1990, p. 42

⁹ Kirthinath Kurthakoti. *Yugadharma haagu Sahithya Darshana*. Essays on history of Modern Kannada Literature. Dharwad: Manohara Granthamale, 1991

¹⁰ B.M.Sreekanthaiah's introduced a new form of poetry to Kannada literature through his anthology of poems, '*English GeethegaLu*', which was translations of poetry from English into Kannada.

¹¹ '*Geleyara Gumpu*', is a poetry forum started in Dharwad, the then centre of literary activities. This forum actively worked towards popularising poetry. It is said that the poetry sessions and discussions on poetry held at the forum attracted lots of people from different walks of life. This forum initially started by Bendre, also had well known poets like Madhura Chenna, Gokak, Mugali, Anandakanda and many more.

¹² Under B.M. Sreekanthaiah's guidance poets like Ku.Vem.Pu, Pu.Ti.Na, Rajarathnam and others surfaced in Kannada. Early poems by these poets have appeared in '*Kiriya Kaanike*' and '*Taliru*'.

¹³ Kirthinath Kurthakoti. 1998

¹⁴ Kirthinath Kurthakoti. "Saahithya Matthu Sthreevaada", 1998, p. 411

¹⁵ G.S.Amur. "Mahila Kaavya Saadhane Haagu Samasyegalu", in *Sudha Ugadi Visheshaanka* - 1999. Bangalore: The Printers Mysore Limited, 1999

¹⁶ -----, *Essays on Modern Kannada Literature*. Bangalore: Karnataka Sahithya Akademi, 2001

¹⁷ Vijay Kumar. "Kavita Ki Sangat" Panchkula: Adhar Prakashan, 1995

¹⁸ Bachchan Singh. "Hindi Sahitya Ka Doosara Itihas", Delhi: Radha Krishna Prakashan Private Limited, 2000

¹⁹ Suman Raje. "Hindi Sahitya Ka Asdha Itihas", New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 2003

²⁰ -----, 'The Creative World of The Contemporary Women Poets', in Singh, Virendra. *Samkalin Kavita*, Jaipur: Panchsheel Prakashan, 1987, p. 117

THE LITERARY – CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF CONTEMPORARY

WOMEN’S POETRY

‘In your shadow mother,

I stand firm on the soil’

- S. Malathi.

“*Ammanige*”,¹

Helabekenisiddu.

This chapter mainly deals with the literary and cultural background set for women’s poetry of the post nineteen eighties. Attention is drawn towards the construction of the nation in the form of a woman and its influence on the ideal womanhood prescribed for the nation’s women; its repercussions in the socio-literary spaces are looked on in this chapter. The periodisation usually seen in the histories of Kannada and Hindi literatures give almost no space to the contribution by women. Women’s writing does not fit into those parameters and demands a different categorization and periodisation. Three categorisations are identified under which poetry by women are discussed. The ebb and fall of poetry by women goes along the changes taking place in the literary and social realms.

Taking this into consideration, the silence maintained by women poets is also read as a response to the prevailing trends. This chapter deals with the background for the post eighties poetry by women, discussed in the later part of the dissertation.

Among a number of other things associated with the re-structuring of a 'new nation', the re-configuration of 'Indian identity' was a task to be looked at. To meet the essential needs, strong foundations were laid in the socio-cultural realms. This not only motivated one to contest the colonial construction of 'the Indian' but also provided a platform where the 'new Indian' was being imagined.

The image of the 'Indian' by the western commentators as irrational, deceitful and sexually perverse needed to be set right to carve the image of the 'New Indian'. This New Indian represented the newly emerging nation, with the capabilities to challenge the 'West'. As Susie Tharu and K.Lalitha have rightly argued in the introduction of their seminal anthology, *'Women's Writing in India'*, sculpting the new respectability was one of the major tasks taken on by social reform movements in India during the nationalist struggle, which set out to transform a traditional society into a modern one.² Indian nationalists believed that women would provide moral and numerical strength to work towards this. They were more concerned about the 'moral purity' of the society, which was of a greater importance to them, as the entire nationalist movement was perceived on these grounds. It is worth noticing that the notion of moral purity takes the form of chastity when referred to women. Several scholars like Partha Chatterjee, Tharu and Lalitha, Sangari and Vaid, Francisca Orsini and others have observed

that regulating the new woman was one of the central concerns of the reform movement.

As the new nationalism glorified India's past, it fostered conservative attitudes towards social beliefs and practices as well. Partha Chatterjee in his essay, 'The Nation and its Women', points out that the social space was divided into spiritual and the material and women represented the true identity, which was part of the spiritual space.³ Women's reform then meant a work towards the safeguarding of this true identity. The reforms proposed by the nationalists were also an attempt to construct the new woman. Thus 'the women's question' was one of the central issues in the Nationalist movement.

Well known feminist scholars like Kumkum Sanghari, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Susie Tharu, K. Lalitha and others have already drawn our attention towards the role of upper caste and middle class ideologies in developing notions of 'Hindu' and 'Indian' womanhood, which is in contradistinction to the actual patriarchal norms prevalent among the other classes and in opposition to the 'western' woman.⁴

In due course, 'middle class' womanhood was portrayed as the 'ideal Indian womanhood'. It was understood that the 'ideal woman' is culturally superior to the westernised women as well as the common women of the lower classes/castes. According to Sanghari and Vaid, the formation of the desired notion of spirituality and of womanhood is thus very much a part of the formation

of the middle class itself, wherein hierarchies and patriarchies are sought to be maintained on both material and spiritual grounds.⁵

In the process, only certain issues related to women within this patriarchal framework get highlighted while the others get suppressed. If the reformers had to consider issues related to women in general they had to work without damaging or maligning the new concept of the ideal Indian woman reflected in the image of '*Bharatha Mathe*' (Mother India) or '*Karnataka Maathe*' (The Kannada Mother) who emerged as icons, representative of a cultural model that was part of the idea of a sacred Nation. In the after-word of the English translation of a Hindi novel '*Mai*', by Geetanjali Shree, the author points out that,

Mothers are known to have strengths, most ostensibly to decide, control, manipulate – none of which is particularly hidden. Yet they seem to be puppets who dance to everyone's tune, even when they are known to have solid cores, definite shapes, and rock hard resistances.⁶

The concept of the Indian nation was perceived in the form of a 'woman', as a mother/goddess and this kind of portrayal was being made in almost all the visual and verbal systems of signification (see Images: 'Bharat Mata' and 'Mahatma Gandhi', page. 231). The nationalist scholars have invoked the notion of kinship in order to resolve any conflict between the nation and the linguistic region. The image of '*Karnataka Maathe*' was being constructed along the lines of '*Bharatha Maathe*'. Mother Karnataka is lauded as the daughter of Mother India. The bond between mother and daughter is celebrated. This bond also gets highlighted and

extended as a representation of the sacred bond between mothers and daughters of the nation. As both the formations were products of similar situations, neither the mother nor her daughters are self-dependent to give an independent space for the women of this nation. The mother-daughter bondings were invoked to fix the idea of sacredness and dependence. When this was done, the responsibility to defend and protect the nation as well as its women automatically goes into the hands of the 'sons of the soil'. Sumathi Ramaswamy while introducing the concept of *Tamilttaay*, the "Tamil Mother", notes that the figure of *Tamilttaay* imagined as the founding mother and guardian deity of the Tamil-speaking community, 'underwent a fundamental transformation, from high goddess and sovereign queen, to a frail and endangered mother totally dependent on her "children", the loyal speakers of Tamil.'⁷

The construction of ideal Indian womanhood and the construction of the nation in the form of mother were carried on simultaneously. Motherhood gained utmost importance in the construction of the ideal Indian womanhood. Several feminist scholars have already drawn our attention to the above fact. For example, Francesca Orsini who has worked on the Hindi Public sphere observes that,

Motherhood was isolated as the central experience of women's lives, and charged with a new nationalist significance: children were no private family affair but were the children of the nation and the makers of tomorrow's India.⁸

Motherhood, the significant identity of this period, also carried with it qualities like tolerance, patience, affection and forgiveness. Qualities like valour, spirit to defend and the urge to fight went against the sober qualities associated with the concept of ideal Indian womanhood now suffused with maternal qualities. Therefore the responsibility of protecting the motherland fell to the 'sons of the soil'. The 'man' emerged as the saviour and 'woman' his dependant. Only those issues related to women which fitted into this framework and contributed towards strengthening the idea of the nation as a woman, were considered by the nationalists. The caste and class distinctions of the emerging middle class also affected the notion of the motherhood/womanhood. As Sanghari and Vaid indicate, it is true that,

.....Reforms undertaken during nationalism have been interrogated in terms of their class and caste character, their role in redefining gender and patriarchies has been largely ignored.⁹

Therefore one needs to watch those elements recovered in the name of tradition and those incorporated in the name of modernity.

The recovery of tradition throughout the nationalist period was always the recovery of the 'traditional' woman – her various shapes continuously readapt the 'eternal' past to the needs of the contingent present.¹⁰

This woman recovered from the contours of tradition was specially modified to counter the notion of Western womanhood and to represent the 'new Indian womanhood'. Partha Chatterjee notes that, 'The social order connecting the home and the world in which nationalism placed the new woman was contrasted not

only with that of modern western societies; it was distinguished from the patriarchy of indigenous tradition'¹¹ The new Indian woman was neither wholly traditional nor completely modern.

However, there seems to be an interesting division of social space among men and woman by the nationalists. Modern ways of organizing our social life such as politics, science and technology, which provided strength to the West to colonize other parts of the world, were to be borrowed by us from 'outside' to strengthen ourselves and tackle the West. The 'inside', represented by the indigenous culture, tradition and the traditional, was forbidden to the outside world. The true identity of the 'inside' thus lay in the spiritual. The home and the space outside home were signifiers of the spiritual and the material worlds. This dichotomy had a special significance for the nationalists. Once the spiritual distinctiveness of our culture was safeguarded, any compromise to attain superiority over the material world was acceptable. This framework based on the dichotomy of the spiritual/inside and the material/outside was extended to all fields. Home represented the inner spiritual self and our 'true identity' and women were the representatives of this space. They were considered to be the representatives of the purity and sacredness of this spiritual inside and were expected to maintain and restore the sanctity of the *inside*. The *outside* materialistic world mostly belonged to men.¹²

The emphasis on the reformation of the so-called spiritual or the true identity then meant the reformation of the true Indian self. Therefore, educating women who were the true representatives of this true Indian self was also

essential. Women's education was one of the most important agendas of the reformist movement. As Orsini notes, debates on 'woman's question', were also profoundly affected by the symbolic identification of womanhood with 'Indianness'.¹³

To understand the formation of the woman's self during the postcolonial period it is necessary to look into the process of fashioning of the self by earlier women writers. In other words, to understand the arguments proposed by contemporary women's writings in Kannada and Hindi, it is essential to look into the formation of women's subjectivity that preceded this period. Women's writing does not fit into the parameters of periodisation usually followed in the histories of Kannada and Hindi literature. The contribution by women in the field of literature demands a different categorisation and periodisation, which accommodates their voices and views. Women's poetry from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary period are discussed under three movements in the history of women's writing. They are as follows:

The Nationalist Movement. (1920 – 1950)

Movement of Self Expression. (1940 – 1970)

The Movement of Identity Politics. (1980 onwards)

For the sake of convenience each movement is recognised under a specific period. This does not mean that the concerns of the movement do not move beyond the marked periodisation.

The Nationalist Movement and the women writers (1920 – 1950):

Social reforms by the nationalist elite in India had begun in the late nineteenth century itself. Indian woman was the central object of social reforms that were floated during this period. From the twenties to the early fifties was a period when debates regarding women's education surfaced and it is in this period that women writers wrote extensively in most of the Indian languages. Writing by women during this period highlights varied opinions of the women writers about women's education, socialization and modernization of women. In the context of Kannada and Hindi, some of these views foreground the image of the Indian woman as '*grihalaxmi*', the goddess of the home and '*aryakulaangane*' (honourable woman of a dignified family) or '*arya mahila*' (An honourable woman), the one who belongs to the *aryan* dynasty (women of the *aryan* dynasty were believed to have been independent from the shadow of men). The women writers of this period expected the society to be more humane towards them. Their arguments were focused mainly on women's education and social equality for women. They also edited magazines which carried articles by women that discussed issues related to women and their reforms. I would like to read these narratives as resistance narratives for they also are opinions by women, their responses to the prevailing patriarchal structures and are about the formation of women's subjectivities.

Several women were active in the social and literary realms during the nineteen twenties to nineteen fifties. In the context of Kannada and Hindi, writings by Tirumalaamba, Kalyanamma, Saraswathi Bai Rajwade, Subhadra

Kumari Chauhan, Mahadevi Verma, etc., sketch various dimensions associated with the positioning of women in the society. Writings by women poets are more profuse in Hindi during the Nationalist Movement than in Kannada.

Some of the important concerns voiced by Indian women/writers of this period can be traced as:

- Betterment of the conditions of women both in the family and in the society.
- Formal education of women.
- Finding a space in the Nationalist discourse.

Women writers not only wrote on these issues at the discursive realm but also produced literary texts that represent their concerns. These issues taken up simultaneously by women are very much interrelated. They not only shape the portrayal of the ideal Indian woman but also contribute towards the representation of women's subjectivity. I shall first discuss the Kannada scenario and then support my argument by bringing in samples from the Hindi language.

In Kannada, women wrote and published their poems since 1900 but women poets/writers never came to the forefront. This was due to many reasons. Some of them were widows, victims of child marriage living a solitary life, dedicated to God. Some of it was because the patriarchal society considered inhibition in women to be 'natural', as 'natural' as the social and traditional constraints forced upon them just because they were born as women. They were either neglected or simply ignored by the mainstream at every point of history and a number of women poets remained invisible on the vast canvas of Kannada literature. For example, Anantha Padmanabha Rao notes that,

Gurulingamma Baitara Siddamallappa Bagevaadi's poems were published as '*Padyaroopavali*' in 1916. '*Kirtanatarangini*' another poetry collection by the same poet was published in 1930. '*Saaleya Haadugalu*' a poetry collection by Shantabai Neelagara was published in 1922. M.Lakshamma's '*BhajanaRathnavali*' was published in 1932. Bharatada Nagamma was famous for her songs for women. Her poems were published as '*Baalika Geeta Kusumaanjali*' in 1937. '*Stree Geeta Sangraha*' by Kalaburgi Umadevi was published in 1957...¹⁴

He mentions the names of many more women poets to establish the emergence of modern women's poetry from the early twentieth century in the Kannada context. But there is hardly any literature on these writers found in the canon. Women writers fought against the odds and continued their writings both in Kannada and Hindi. Hence, it is important to retrieve and record the history of our mothers as the background of contemporary women's writings in Kannada and Hindi.

As said earlier, women argued for women's education, a betterment of their living in general, improvement in the condition of widows and against child marriage. This was their agenda in the private and public spheres and it came out through their writings. Some women were engaged both in writing and with activities associated with the emancipation of women, the reformist zeal in these women resulted in their writings. Tirumalamba, Kalyanamma, and Belagere Janakamma laid the foundation of women's writing that followed in the later years in Kannada.

Tirumalamba (1887-1982) is the first woman novelist, poet, critic, editor and publisher in Kannada. She edited magazines for women in Kannada like '*Karnataka Nandini*', '*Sanmaargadarshini*', '*Veeramathe*'.¹⁵ She wrote at least eighty poems between 1901 and 1902. They are compiled in the collection of poems titled as "*Bhaktigeethavali*". In an interview given to C. N. Mangala, Tirumalamba has said that these poems were prayers pleading to God to show her the way and calm down the sadness of her heart which was being subjected to an angry fate. Her first poem in the collection written in three stanzas, "*Sraswathi (Bharathi) Poreyennanu*" (Bharathi Protect Me), came out around 1902. The first part of *Bhaktigeethavali* is prayers to *Vagdevi* and has thirteen poems, the second part contains prayers to *Mahalaxmi* and has twenty seven poems, the third part *Harikeerthanas* has sixty poems, while the fourth, *Atmopadesha* (Self Preaching) has sixteen poems and the fifth on *Kolata (Dandia*, a dance by dancer holding small coloured sticks) comprises of twelve poems.

On the whole, *Bhaktigeethavali* has one hundred and twenty eight poems in it.¹⁶ Some of them were published in some of the issues of '*Karnataka Nandini*'. Some published as part of her novels and other creative works like, *Ramananda*, *Chandravadana*, *Bhargavagarva*, *Bhanga*, *Vivekodaya*, *Sumukhivijaya* and *Ajaamilopaakhyana* were part of the *Satihitaishini* publication series. Eight of her works were prescribed as text books for the S.S.L.C and Inter classes in Madras, for Metric and Degree classes in Mumbai, fourth form, fifth form, S.S.L.C, Senior Inter and B.A classes in Mysore between 1918 and 1933. Tirumalamba's poems appeared in three anthologies. '*Bhadrageethavali*' (1916),

‘BhakthiGeethavali’ (1970) and *‘Bhaavageethavali’* (posthumously published in 1988).

She is the first major woman writer in Kannada who advocated the woman’s self. According to Shivarama Paddikkal the women characters in her writings are independent; self-confident and are able to take decisions on their own.¹⁷ She argued for a social space for women. She was against the confinement of women within the four walls of the house. Tirumalamba opposed child marriage, the tonsure of widows, dowry, and ostentatious expenditures, especially at weddings. She also talked about the way a woman should live in a society and what a society should expect from women.

Tirumalamba’s concept of the ideal woman is reflected in all her writings, be it journalistic or creative. Though she functioned within a limited conventional position, she glorified the abilities of women and was responsible for generating a tremendous confidence in their strength. Love, affection, patience and sacrifice were some of the very important qualities she talked about. These are the key qualities she gives to her protagonists. As Shivarama Padikkal says, it is quite evident from Tirumalamba’s writings that she subscribes to the view that a woman has to proclaim her feminine identity by overcoming all the obstacles through her ‘patience, virtue, culturedness, education and will power’.¹⁸ While writing about the way women should take care of the health of their family members, she says,

Men may not have as caring a heart filled with sympathy as women. There would be few people who would not listen to you.

If each of you take care of the health of your family members, the problem of death and diseases at a younger age will vanish from our country.¹⁹

Tirumalamba strongly believed that women were more powerful than men in every way. She claimed in one of her articles that women were to be understood as a saviour of man and society. In her opinion while a man is an innocent 'child', woman is 'the mother' who cared for him, corrected him, and bore all the responsibilities for him.²⁰ By such analyses, Tirumalamba elevated women's position. She highlighted the importance of women both in the family and in the society. Recurring questions like male dominance and domestic oppression of women were addressed by women writers of her time.

Tirumalamba lost her husband at the age of fourteen. She was traditionally educated at home and was not exposed to an English education as was common in her time. Hence, though she advocates women's education, she perceives the problems faced by widows from a 'traditional' position. Widowhood, she believed, was the result of evil deeds of a woman in her previous life. It is important to note here that Tirumalamba resisted the popular belief that widows themselves were evil to the family and inauspicious to a society. Widow characters in her novel fight for dignity and work to serve the society, but oppose re-marriage and renounce worldly pleasure. As noted by C.N.Mangala,

Tirumalamba never thought of divorce or any kind of tug of war between men and women. She believed that a husband was the ultimate god for a wife. Because Tirumalamba had full support and encouragement from her father she could never think of men

as wrongdoers. She always proposed that both men and women should make attempts to understand each other. She wished that women would educate men about their responsibilities towards their women.²¹

For Tirumalamba, an ideal woman is a caring mother, an educated person capable of educating others and an obedient wife. As observed by Shivarama Padikkal, '*Maathru Nandini*', (Nandini, the divine mother) '*Vidhyarthini*' (one who seeks knowledge) and '*Sathi Hithaishini*' (the benevolent wife) are the ideal metaphors through which Tirumalamba perceives her female protagonists.²² According to a Kannada critic, Vijaya Dabbe, Tirumalamba's defence of women's capabilities, intellectual power, and their right to a dignified life are remarkable.

When women wrote about their plight, men differed on some of the ideas propagated by women while agreeing on a few. Masti Venkatesha Iyengar, an established writer, a novelist, and a critic in Kannada language in his book *Vimarshe* (Criticism) wrote a special article on the Sathihitaishini Publications. In this article he reviewed novels written by Tirumalamba. Masti begins by defining what a novel is and then moves on to prove how Tirumalamba's writings both in structure and content do not qualify as novels. He sarcastically comments on the author's intension of bringing in women's emancipation. Masti also raises questions regarding the portrayal of the women protagonists in Tirumalamba's novels. He further points out how the women characters do not cater to the dos and don'ts prescribed to them by the society and therefore are artificial and

lacking in noble behaviour. He writes at length about the specific qualities of the ideal womanhood.²³ One of Tirumalamba's articles written in the 1920s demonstrates such differences of opinion. She said –

There have been differences of opinion among male writers regarding women's progress and its downfalls. The reason for such differences in my opinion is the incomplete knowledge that men have about the natural structure and character of women's mind, their intellect and intuitions. Men have not taken into consideration the constant conditioning and orientation of women's minds by so many thousand years.²⁴

In the early decades of 1900, the idea of women's education gained momentum in Karnataka. Whether women should be educated or not, if yes what kind of education do they deserve and if education is responsible for diverting women from their usual responsibilities were the hot topics of discussion. Suggestions were made for 'educating women' in certain ways so that the then existing family and the social order would not be disturbed. In an article '*Baalika Shikshana*' (education for girl children), K. Ramaswamy Iyengar argues,

Actual education for women comprises of more than learning alphabets and going to school. *First* comes house keeping, *second* is to learn to live according to the husband's will and wish, *third* is about how to respect and take care of the in-laws and the other members of the husband's family, the art of saving and managing money is the *fourth* and the *fifth* is to have good company.²⁵

He gives a detailed account of why and how these help in keeping a family happy and intact. Tirumalamba agrees completely with him. A good wife, according to her was the one who obeyed her husband and considered him a God. For example, in her novel, '*Nabha*', (1914) she says,

Learned readers! Do those gripped by the desire for wealth ever respect their gurus, their parents, their kith, or kin? Do they think of evaluating anything in terms of justice and injustice? ... Nabha a witness to this exchange, thought, "What? Can a wife demand so much of her husband? Isn't he to be treated as a god? O Lord Rama! How cruel are the ways of the world! ..."26

While K. Ramaswamy Iyengar's position forces women into the folds of domesticity alone, Tirumalamba argues for a position, which allows women the right to get education. It does not stop women from acquiring knowledge through alphabets. Though she agrees that the duty of a woman is to take care of the family and respect the husband, she insists on providing education for women. She suggests that education is necessary for women because it would help them in becoming better wives and mothers.

One can find such comments in her editorials and '*Sathi Hitaishini*', a column she wrote in '*Karnataka Nandini*'. An article on late Ambal Narasingayyengar who initiated education for women in Karnataka was carried in *Karnataka Nandini*.²⁷ This obituary also covers the proceedings of '*Prajaprathinidhi Sabhe*' (The Mysore Representative assembly) and the '*Artha*

Saadhaka Sabhe' (the Budget Session) where important decisions were taken regarding women's education.

Immediately after Sree Chamarajendra Wodeyar took over as king of Mysore in 1881, he constituted '*Prajaa Prathinidhi Sabhe*' (The Mysore Representative assembly).²⁸ Ambal Narasimha Iyengar the then advisor (*Darbaarubhakshi*) for the Maharaja Sree Chamarajendra Wodeyar played a major role towards the success of this. In princely Mysore there was a long discussion about why women need to be educated and what kind of education was to be imparted to them. Mr. Vema Reddy, a landholder of Malur Taluk and the member of *Praja Pratinidhi Sabhe* proposed that women should be educated towards being good children, good sisters, good wives and good mothers. Education should help them towards being good homemakers. Smt Rukmaniyamma who was later posted as the Women's Interests Lady Superintendent, Maharani's College, Mysore, argued for women's education and introduction of Kannada as the medium of instruction. During the sessions of *Praja Prathinidhi Sabhe*, reacting to the doubts raised by Vema Reddy, whether women would go wayward if they are educated, Smt Rukmaniyamma argued that men were the sole cause for all the misfortunes occurring in women's lives.

Education for Women was officially executed in the *Mysore Samsthana* (The Princely Mysore State) in 1881.²⁹ With the support of Narasimhaiyengar, the 'Maharani Girls School' and the 'Maharani Women's College' were established. Ambal Narasimhaiyengar was also responsible for the establishment of 'Bhashojjivini College', '*Karnataka Nataka Sabhe*', 'Marimallappa School' and

'Abalaashrama'. 'Maharani College Hostels' were started and sanction was given for the use of the prestigious Devaraja Bahadur Fund towards women's education. Many women took the BA and MA exams. Gradually the number of educated women increased.³⁰ Ambal Narasimhaiyengar is said to have paid a number of parents for sending their aged daughters to school and such girls who went to school received up to Rs. 50 per month as scholarship from him. He argued with the Maharaja that when such large amounts of money were being spent on posh banquets and other affairs of the State from which no returns can be expected, spending on women's education should not be considered as desecrate. The article '*Sthree Vidhyaabhyaasa*' (Women's Education),³¹ which appeared in *Karnataka Nandini* and the editorial '*Balikeyara-Mahileyara Shikshana*' (Education for Girls and Women),³² which appeared in *Veeramaate* clearly gives a picture of the kind of education proposed by Tirumalamba for women. She agreed with Ambal Narasingayyengar that the education for women should be intended not only to impart knowledge but also to shape them as good daughters, good sisters, good wives and good mothers. She believed that there is a specific direction in life for women. If this direction goes wayward, it would result in crossing the boundaries of '*Sthreedharma*' (righteousness of a woman). Reacting to Rukminiyamma's argument at the '*Prajaa Prathinidhi Sabhe*' (The Mysore Representative Assembly), Tirumalamba writes, that men are not the sole cause for all the misfortunes in women's life. She reasoned that there were large number of women not at all exposed to formal education who have managed their husbands, sons and brothers through their experiences and natural wisdom. Women need to have religious earnestness, belief, concern for their duties, sympathy, obedience and submission in order to control men. All these qualities

she felt have been omitted in today's education. She pointed out that the emancipation of widows was not considered under the women's education project, 'This could have resulted in the exclusion of philosophical perspective, patience and caring which should have been part of the syllabi', she argued.³³ She demanded an education with training programmes for the 'orphaned-destitute sisters' that would give them peace and contentment in both worlds.³⁴ She stressed that education for women should highlight the qualities women acquire by birth. It should remind them of their limitations and their duties as women belonging to the '*aryadharmā*'.

The whole debate about women's education was also a debate that contributed towards the construction of the subjectivity of the new Indian women. The new Indian woman should resist male domination, refuse to be a shadow of man and prove herself to be the '*Arya Mahila*' who sustains all representations of '*Aryadharmā*'.

Nationalism is another area where contributions by women have to be noted. *Bhavageetavali* the collection of poems by Tirumalamba has a number of poems that invoke the Kannadaness and Karnataka as a nation. These poems have women as central characters. The poet invites her brave sisters to come forward and stand by the country. She says that the women should bring freedom to the nation by encouraging their men to fight for the country and drive out the foreigners. Another poem similar to this is where the poet wakes up the mother (land) saying that her irresponsible sons have all proved to be *eunuchs* and of no use.

...Mother, your sons, an irresponsible lot!

Like eunuchs, they have lost all courage³⁵

Therefore it is the task of '*Arya Mahile*', the women concerned about '*Arya Dharma*' to wake the Mother up.

Tirumalamba gives a call to the women to wake up and take the responsibility of mobilizing men and inviting them to fight for the nation. She asks them, '...who else could safeguard the treasury of *Karnataka Maathe* at this crucial hour?'³⁶

Yet another poem published in '*Sanmaargadarshini*' in February 1923, is about cautioning Karnataka Mathe (mother) about her irresponsible and cowardly sons.

Arye! Our *arya* women who believe in *aaryadharm*a are in trouble. So wake up, mother and help your children...³⁷

Thus Tirumalamba wrote a number of poems invoking Kannadaness and the Kannada nation. C.N.Mangala, a noted Kannada critic has established '*Shashwati*', the trust in Tirumalamba's name and has instituted an award. This award will be conferred annually on an Indian woman writer considered to be the best of the year. Mangala observes that these poems were written much before B.M.Srikantaiah's '*Kannada Taayanota*' (The Vision of Mother Kannada), which appeared in 1936³⁸ and is acclaimed in the book, 'A History of Kannada Literature'³⁹ by R.S. Mugali as the first poem in Kannada to express Kannada Nationalism. Tirumalamba also published writings by other women in her magazine⁴⁰ 'Bhakti Poetry' form, which was already available, was used by

women writers of this period to talk about themselves and their problems. During the 1930s many women poets published their poems in '*Karnataka Nandini*'. Yaggamma and Tulasi Bai Subbarao who wrote under the pen name '*mallige*' are important among them.⁴¹

R.Kalyanamma (1892 - 1965), writer and an activist, was also a well-known social worker. R. Kalyanamma founded Sharadha Stree Samaja (The Sharada Women's Society) in 1913 that worked towards the betterment of women.⁴² She edited the magazine '*Saraswathi*' for almost four decades. Campaigning for the education of women was the main agenda of this magazine. Kalyanamma's primary motive was to bring awareness among the modern women about their deplorable status by awakening and correcting their collective conscience and thus lead them on the path of progress. She did this by portraying the ideal histories of the *aryan* women to a modern day female audience in '*Saraswathi*'.⁴³ Though more and more women were getting educated, women's education and educating women remained important issues for discussion.

Kalyanamma published articles written for and by women in her magazine '*Saraswathi*'. '*Saraswathi*' published the presidential address by Smt Gauradevi Inchalmutt who presided the women's session of the '*Kannada Sahitya Sammelana*' (The Kannada Literary Conference), held at Gulbarga in 1949. In her presidential address Smt Gauradevi Inchalmutt said,

Everybody is aware of the women's status during the Vedic times.

As times passed, the differentiation between men and women increased, marking a clear-cut distinction in the roles played by

each. There was a sharp decline in the literary pursuits due to the changed status of women's education. Those women who had once created Vedas and hymns now could not even recite them; they could not read, listen to or see the ancient texts. Not just that, they should neither remotely relate to it nor meddle with dharma. Women were forbidden to perform religious rituals, forced to believe that there was no god above their husband. Women were subjugated through such restrictions and regulations for selfish motives which hampered their progress and resulted in their alienation leading to literary degradation and further blocking their access to literature.⁴⁴

Like elsewhere, women writers in Karnataka too have considered the Vedic period as the 'golden age' of women's education and social status. A glorified picture of the past was being imagined against the then prevailing situation. Through magazines, creative writing and public speeches, women raised questions about themselves, the roles they played and the social norms. In the process, as Orsini sees,

They were partly shaped by current symbols and notions of Indian femininity, at the same time they refashioned these symbols in the new spaces they had access to, whether in literature or any other fields like political activism, etc.⁴⁵

Though the context was different for Hindi, discussions, debates and decisions regarding women's education are very similar to that in Kannada.

Nationalist movement seems to have a greater influence in shaping the point of departure and also becomes the centre for a number of issues associated with the notions of education and socio-cultural identity. According to Orsini, women's voices began to appear in the Hindi press and Hindi literature only in the 1920s. The Nationalist movement and its reformist zeal provided a perfect platform for issues related to women's education.

Hindi played a more prominent role in girls' education than in that of boys. ... In an educated household, boys were often educated in Urdu and English and girls in Hindi. This was partly due to the fact that women's education was not intended to be conducive to employment but rather envisaged as an instrument of self-improvement, and partly due to Hindi's association with religion and with devotional texts.⁴⁶

Men in keeping with women's roles as mothers and housewives planned out their education. Like in the Kannada context, a series of articles and stories were published in Hindi magazines debating whether women's education should be role based or not. In 1916 Purushottam Das Tandon wrote:

The education of each person should keep in mind what he or she has to do when he or she grows up ... In a word, I believe that the ideal of the whole of women's education should be one of making them into *sugrihinis* (ideal women who took care of the household). Since a woman's true dharma is *paativrat dharma*, devotion

to her husband, education should aim at strengthening these roles, not at threatening them.⁴⁷

Both in Hindi as well as in Kannada the entire discussion was centred on the *maryaada*, the bounds of morality for women in the society. Every now and then the importance of *maryaada* was highlighted. Orsini observes that education, in a sense became a way for women to argue for their right to define their own roles. Women's journals in Hindi⁴⁸ like *Grihalakshmi*, *Stree-Darpan*, and *Chand* fostered upcoming women writers and issues related to women.

Like in Kannada, even in Hindi literature and culture, construction of an ideal Indian womanhood and the construction of the nation in the form of the mother were carried on simultaneously and Motherhood gained supreme significance. Nationalism and the subjectivity of women connected to Indian nationalism gained utmost importance. Women poets also contributed to this in a major way.

Subhadra Kumari Chauhan (1904-1948) is a major Hindi poet. She is known to have combined in her personality 'the patriotism of Joan of Arc and the lyricism of Meera'.⁴⁹ She was born in a village called Nihalpur in Allahabad. Educated at Crosthwaite School, Allahabad, she became a full-time congress activist along with her husband Thakur Laxman Singh of Khandwa whom she married in 1919. She actively participated in the National Struggle and was the first woman *Satyagrahi* to be arrested in Nagpur. She was one of the few women

not to observe *purdha* or seclusion. Subhadra Kumari Chauhan took part in all major campaigns during the nationalist struggle and was elected MLA in 1936.⁵⁰ She wrote highly inspiring patriotic poems like '*Senani Ka Swagat*' (Welcoming the soldier) and '*Veeron ka Kaise ho Vasant*' (How should the spring be for brave men). Her '*Jhansi ki Rani*' (Queen of Jhansi) is one of the most recited and sung poems in Hindi literature. Hindi critic Ramdarash Mishra in his article 'Poetry of the Post Romantic era'⁵¹ identifies two streams in Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's poems, one patriotic and the other, family life. The second category of poems celebrate motherhood and a wife's love for her husband. Noted Progressive poet and critic in Hindi, Gajanan Muktibodh notes that, while other women poets are engrossed in using the elements of Nationalism as their themes, Subhadra Kumari stands apart from them, because she writes about the subtleties of family, motherhood and womanhood along with nationalism. He says,

Subhadra Kumari remains special because the tone of affection in her poems originates from motherly warmth. An affectionate motherhood is deeply etched in her poems.⁵²

.....While I was reckoning my childhood,
my little daughter speaks.
This little dwelling of mine
Then, blossoms into a 'garden in spring'⁵³

While motherhood and certain other qualities of womanhood were being celebrated in literature and other areas of life, different other issues noted by women writers of that time did not get much importance. Tharu and Lalitha observe that,

The commitments that run through all her works are an intense patriotism, a need to secure equal rights for women, but above all, it would seem, a desire to break down the barriers of caste and religion that divide people.⁵⁴

Mukul (Flower), 1930 and *Bikhre Moti* (Scattered Pearls) 1932 are her poetry collections. Her poems for children were published independently in journals.

Mahadevi Varma (1902-1987) is one of the greatest Hindi poets. Born in Farukhabad, Uttar Pradesh, Mahadevi Varma was just nine years old when she got married, she was nevertheless permitted to pursue her studies first at home and later at school and college. A competent student, she was a contemporary of Subhadra Kumari and was also educated at the Crosthwaite School, Allahabad. She then passed out of Allahabad University with an MA in Sanskrit in 1932. On completing her studies she took to writing poetry. Teaching and public service were her other interests.

Though she did not take an active political role like Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Mahadevi Verma took to wearing Khadi and started teaching as a volunteer in two villages outside Allahabad. Like Tirumalamba, Mahadevi strongly believed that education was essential for women. Founder of the '*Prayag Mahila Vidyapitha*', she promoted the education of girls and served as principal of this institution. She is renowned for her book of memoirs, '*Ateet Ke Chalchitra*' (The Moving Frames of the Past) and *Smriti Ki Rekhaben* (The Lines of Memory). Her book '*Ateet Ke Chalchitra*' translated by Neera Kuckreja as

‘Sketches from My Past: Encounters with India's Oppressed’ is a powerful collection of real-life portraits of oppressed women and other deprived members of society.

Her decision to write prose and poetry and attend '*kavi sammelans*' (poetry festivals) was daring for those times. Mahadevi Varma's uniqueness lay in her commanding parity with men. She is widely recognised, along with Nirala, Sumitranand Pant and Jaishankar Prasad, as one of the four founder-leaders of the new romantic school of Hindi poetry that came to be known as '*Chhayavad*'.

As an activist she tackled women's issues, helping women to actually overcome their vulnerability rather than merely theorizing about them. Her involvement in activism is what really makes Mahadevi Varma a different writer too. Her writings revealed her deep concern for unfortunate and exploited women. Sensing the burden on Indian women serving as slaves to men enslaved by colonial power, she wrote incisive essays debating the role and situation of women. The best of these appeared in '*Chand*', a women's magazine of that time which has been later compiled as a book in the year 1942 as '*Shrinkhla Ki Kadiyaan*' (The Chains of Subjugation). She says,

The truth is that begging has never procured women their rights nor will it ever in the future, because their condition is distinct from other objects of exchange.

.....In society, a man's rights are decided by his co-operation and his contribution towards development. In this way our rights are relative to our strengths and abilities. This might not sound very

practical but its application will prove its validity. Many a times I have been able to improve women's conditions by awakening their inner strength rather than trying to change their external circumstances. The solution of the problem depends on the knowledge of the problem. And, this knowledge solicits a knowing mind. Therefore one who desires to possess authority should also learn to exercise it.....Woman is a man's counterpart. Like man, woman is also an important member of the society.⁵⁵

While she was of immediate help to the young middle class women through the institution she headed, her writings centred on the lives of unsung women heroes whose socio-economic status remained submerged. The lives of these women became permanently etched in some of her outstanding prose. Her book of memoirs, '*Ateet Ke Chalchitra*', is mainly centred on the experience of women who touched Mahadevi Varma's life deeply. Her poetry imbibed an intense mystical quality. The mystical qualities in her writings led to the birth of a movement called *Rahasyavad* in Hindi. In nature she saw infinite mystery, expanse, depth, eternity and an indomitable spirit. She equated the perennial link between the human heart and nature to that between an object and its shadow. The following lines demonstrate her love for nature:

Why an introduction dear, you are within me,
... You are drawn, I am just an outline,
you are the sweet melody, I am just a string of
notes,
you are limitless, I am but an illusion of

limits,

In the secrecy of real image-reflection,

why enact to be lovers!!!

Why an introduction, since you are within me.⁵⁶

Mahadevi Varma has authored over five volumes of poetry besides essays, memoirs and criticism pieces. Apart from literary criticism, devotional issues also formed an important part of her writing. Some of her published anthologies are *Nihar*, *Rashmi*, *Neeraja*, *Sandhya Geet*, *Deepshika* and *Neelambara*.⁵⁷ Mahadevi Varma and Subhadra Kumari Chauhan were two contemporary writers who challenged male monopoly in the field of Hindi poetry.

The birth of the nationalist movement at the end of nineteenth century made a lot of difference in Indian women's lives. A step taken by the Indian women towards their education also led to the tackling of various other women related concerns. Elisabeth Bumiller in the introduction to her book, *May You be the Mother of Hundred Sons, A Journey among the Women of India* notes that,

the All India Women's Conference began in 1927 as a forum that met to discuss women's education but soon expanded into a group that worked to stop *purdah*, child marriage and the other problems... In 1931, largely as a response to women's participation in the civil disobedience campaign, the Congress party passed a resolution endorsing political equality for all women, regardless of

qualifications. This was at a time when women in some European countries had not yet won the right to vote.⁵⁸

Hindi women writers were directly exposed to the changes taking place in the socio-political realms of the country because most of the major nationalist struggles and reform movements started either in parts of Northern India or in Bengal. As a result they had an opportunity to actively participate in the national struggle and the reformist movements. The opportunities available to Kannada women writers during that period to associate themselves with such socio-political movements were very limited. Women writers from the Hindi background responded to Indian Nationalism as it spread in the nation, in general, and the northern parts of the country, in particular. Writers from the Kannada background also responded to the nationwide movement, but they were more concerned with Kannada Nationalism. The main concern then for women's writing, both in Kannada and Hindi, was to improve the plight of the Indian women. Though the agenda arose from similar situations shared by them as Indian women, there were differences. At times the concerns were region and language specific though they shared the national question and the women's question. Women writers raised their voices against oppression within the country and dreamt of a 'new woman' who would lead a better life within her family and society. The reformists' movement that had spread all over the country in various forms laid a perfect background for their demands.

The Self Expressionist Poetry and the Women Writers (1940 – 1960):

The development of women's expressions in Kannada literature underwent certain interesting changes both in reception and perception, from Tirumalamba to Belagere Janakamma, who wrote in the forties. From a reformist mode the trend changed into a self-expressionistic mode. The demands which once focused on women's education, claims to dignity, self-respect and respectable lives for women in society in general now incorporated problems faced by women as individuals. When women realised that their problems were caused by the patriarchal society, they brought out the pitfalls of patriarchy in their writings. They started questioning the male value system and male dominance in their literature. Men were no more considered as innocent, child like individuals who have to be corrected by women. Women's duties grew beyond being an obedient and suppressed wife. Though most of the questions raised by Tirumalamba and her contemporaries remained unanswered, new questions were added to this list.

Belegere Janakamma (1912 – 1966) is the first woman poet of the *Navodaya*⁵⁹ period.⁶⁰ She probably is the first woman poet in whose poems elements of resistance to oppressions surface predominantly. By the time Janakamma started writing, things had changed to some extent. Though women went to schools to seek education, going out of the house was still a taboo in the conservative houses and Janakamma had to give up her education. She regretted this and expressed her liking towards education. She conveys her feeling

efficiently in one of her poems, '*Echcharike*'⁶¹ (Caution) included in her first collection of poems '*Kalyana*', published in 1945 –

Our Sita who is free from all desire,
has a great desire to read.....

In the poem, '*Ganda*' (The Husband) she refers to the domestic violence women go through. Having an agreement with the husband she says, is like –

the frog seeking shelter under the shadow of a snake. If he gets angry he is nothing but 'an incarnation of *Yama* (the God of Death)'. He has the power to decide whether one should float or sink. For a man, wife is just a commodity..... Man is so powerful that he can do anything.Man is extremely powerfulIf you do not listen to him, he can even break your neck.....He is the punisher and he is the protector and so, he is your God! ⁶²

These lines are so sarcastic that they give entirely a different dimension to the poem. She felt that God had cheated the women community.

Woman's body is not a tree limited only to bear children.

However, in her poem, '*Chanda Shasana*'⁶³ (severe reign), she asks, when there is no justice, what is the use of questioning?

Life of simple women who lead a simple life is reflected in her poems. Though her notion of good and bad was dominated by her time, she voiced

resistance to violence, social injustice, and plight of women. She wrote about the plight of women in many of her poems.

‘Hennaata’ (Woman’s Plight)⁶⁴ is one such poem where it is said that the dreams women dream get shattered even before they are realized. In this game between men and women, women perform their roles only to lose.

what’s in a nest
a wild hollow vegetation
no substance no taste
no fragrance

The picture of marriage, considered being the most important stage in a woman’s life is always presented in special ways. The role of a wife is highlighted in the context of marriage. It is understood that an ‘insecure virgin’ enters into the institution of marriage with much eagerness and longing for a secured life. The notion of insecurity attached with women yet to be married and the hope of security and protection associated with the concept of marriage and husband are put to question in Janakamma’s poems. The following poem demonstrates how women become prey to their own instincts.

trusting a trap of habitual instincts
walking into it like an unsuspecting calf
Then...
dance when you are made to dance
play when you are made to play
and oblige to the whole world like a slave.

Nemichandra, a Kannada short story writer who has edited a major book on the life and works of Belegere Janakamma writes,

She has been subjected to the perils of illiteracy and lacked encouragement. She had to write under the accusing gaze of the conservative society and the mockery of the people around her. This is precisely why Janakamma should be considered not just a poet, but also as a voice of the women of the first half of the century, as she documents the status of women in her times, their experiences in general and the most intimate sensibilities of women of her times.⁶⁵

Though several people ridiculed her for writing poems, some of the Kannada writers and readers welcomed her whole-heartedly. She enjoyed a lot of importance during her time. Bellary, the place where she lived was one of the major centres of literary activities in the 1940s. She had a chance to meet most of her contemporary Kannada literary dignitaries. Established poets and writers like D.R.Bendre and Masti Venkatesha Iyengar praised her poems. Bendre and Masti are celebrated literary personalities who have been awarded the *Jananapeeth* for their contribution to Kannada. Bendre and T. Subba Rao have written poems on Janakamma. Rajaratnam, another well-known Kannada poet who has been given a special place in the Kannada cultural scenario by literary critics and common masses visited Janakamma. Many other literary dignitaries including Masti who had an opportunity to visit Bellary made it a point to meet Janakamma. Her poem ‘*moRe*’ (Cry) was published by Masti in his literary journal ‘*Jeevana*’. Her poems

were also published in many other literary magazines. Sir Murugarajendra Swami of Chitradurga Mutt offered financial support to publish her poems.⁶⁶ Though her world was limited to herself and her surroundings, her poems represented women's experiences in general and voiced resistance at large.

An interesting point to be noted is that in the case of Tirumalamba Masti objected that the women characters in her novels were not depicted the way women should behave in the society. In the case of Janakamma, even though the resistance she showed to the patriarchal society was much more direct and strong, he welcomed and promoted her. One reason could be that like Tirumalamba, Janakamma never contested with male writers on equal grounds. Though she talked about the plight of women and condemned male domination, it was on a personal level, limited to the poet and her poems alone. She never got actively involved with activism like Tirumalamba nor did she argue in the public spheres. Women's activism coupled with writing has always been a problem for the mainstream. Apart from this, Janakamma pronounced her association with the male writers as that of a younger sister who needs their encouragement and goodwill. She wrote letters to Bendre in the form of poems, addressing him as her elder brother to which he also replied addressing her as his sister. She received letters in the form of poems from T.Subbarao, Kalgoodu Ashwatharayaru, Y.Nagesha Shastri all addressing her as their sister.⁶⁷ The subjugation of woman's self that is present in the brother-sister relationship itself accommodates space within the patriarchal framework. Thus it was not at all a problem for the male writers to encourage Janakamma. Instead it was their duty to promote and patronize their 'sister'.

The other reason for Masti to promote Janakamma could be that by the time Janakamma started writing, the attitude of society towards its women was undergoing a gradual change. Reformist zeal was already in the air and was greatly valued. Encouraging women into the social spaces was a gesture highly respected. Masti, already an established writer could have shown this gesture. Janakamma called for changes in the attitude of men who oppressed women. Her criticism towards them was harsh. In relation to the life to be led with such men, she sought for changes in woman's life. Though Tirumalamba spoke from a very conservative position she demanded drastic changes for women in the society. Tirumalamba was also his contemporary and her novels were prescribed as text books in colleges and schools. Her writings were popular through the magazines she edited and published. She had a wide readership among academicians and the common public. May be Masti's male ego could not accept a woman competing on equal grounds. Is it the same male ego that gets boosted while promoting a young bright woman? It might have been much easier for Masti to criticize oppressive men than to support women challenging the social order he believed in. The other reason could be that poetry was not as direct as prose. Access to poetry was limited and the readers/audience were from certain limited social groups only.

Women writers were aware that the problems faced by women were due to certain shortcomings in the society. They never considered Literature as an entity independent from society. Women writers were aware that the changes brought about in politics were directly or indirectly responsible for social change. Women had access to education and the power to vote. In 1932 the Government had

recognised the social service provided by the Kannada writer R.Kalyanamma and had appointed her as a woman representative for the City School Board. Then in 1933 she was appointed as a Bench Magistrate in Bangalore, where she served for fifteen years. Women were presiding in literary conferences and actively worked towards women's emancipation. They were editing magazines and journals where they voiced their opinion regarding socio-political issues. Translations of articles regarding women's emancipation, women's rights, etc., were published for the readers.⁶⁸ One of the articles titled 'Men and Women are Equals', a translation from the English magazine, 'Theosophist' was chosen for publication in '*Saraswathi*' in 1955 said,

Now is the age of vote-power. Since women have the right to vote, nobody dares to talk of them insultingly. Not only that, if women realize the power their vote carries and uses it wisely, they could teach the men a good lesson.

Introduction of women's education and other social reforms were effective in bringing a gradual change among women and in the attitude of the society towards women. Women gradually started realizing that their plights as women were the result of the patriarchal social practices. They openly wrote about various kinds of problems they faced as well as the physical and mental violence they came across in their everyday lives. Be it within the family or in the social structure, women have always been kept 'inside' and have been protected from 'outside' invasions. The social space allotted to them is therefore very limited.

Like the other Indian languages Kannada literary history too recognizes very few women writers. After recognizing a few women poets who were part of the twelfth century *Vacana movement*⁶⁹; which is considered to be the secular, egalitarian progressive period; the main stream literary history in Kannada mentions the name of Sanchi Honnamma only in the seventeenth century. Kannada literary history does not mention any women poet till the late nineteenth century. In the beginning of the twentieth century, i.e., during the pre-independence era some of the prominent names of women poets like, Tirumalamba, Belegere Janakamma, Tirumale Rajamma and Jayadevithayi Ligade come to light. While the works by male poets like, B.M.Srikanthaih, Masti Venkatesha Iyengar, Bendre, Pu.Ti.Na were given much critical attention by the literary critics in lengthy paragraphs, the women who wrote during the same period were hardly discussed.

Women Writers and the Progressive Movement in Kannada:

The whole lot of women writers who emerged in the fifties followed the Movement of Self Expression initiated by Belegere Janakamma. Women writers were aware of the plight of women in society and raised their voices against atrocities faced by women in society. The agenda now was a demand for humanity and self-respect. Triveni and Anupama Niranjana are two names who ought to be mentioned here. '*Pragathisheela*'⁷⁰ or the Progressive Movement in Kannada literature was a well-prepared canvas on which women writing flourished. Several women writers appeared on the literary scene during this period. The *Pragathisheela* movement believed in bringing literature from its

romantic persona to the realities of day-to-day affair. Common people and their lives was the subject for the literature of this period.

Along with many other social causes, Progressive literature largely supported women's issues. It was during the Progressive movement that a large number of women writers started figuring in the Kannada literary scene. Their writings centred on home and family. They questioned patriarchies from their own limited spaces. Women writers put forth the psychological trauma women undergo. They talked more openly about their aspirations. Time and again they constructed the image of the 'ideal man' desired by women. Their writings executed a humane perspective towards women. But they were yet to attribute gender discrimination or gender politics as the root cause of women's plight. Triveni can be considered to be a representative woman writer of the Progressive period. Seemantini Niranjana in her article, 'Themes of Femininity'⁷¹ traces the dominant themes in the novels by the Kannada writer Triveni. She notes that,

A broad delineation of themes in Triveni's novels reveals a predictable dailiness in the situations described and the responses of characters. The effect is a narrativization of ordinary everyday life, participating in its making as well. Her thematic focus is largely the family, the relations between man/woman within it and the fulfilment of woman's role through reproduction.

The other women writers during this period had similar traits. Though the Progressive movement largely supported women's issues, in the case of Triveni

and her contemporaries, their writings were branded as 'kitchen literature' and popular literature that did not deserve intellectual recognition. In the literary history of the post sixties all this is simply edited out. Not only has the achievement of women been edited out of literary history but a false version degraded as 'kitchen literature' substitutes it. Women writers wrote novels in large numbers but there was a sudden silence in the field of poetry.

Poetry itself has a limited space where thoughts get condensed to images and metaphors. A woman poet engendering a patriotic self or a self within the given norms of femininity was to some extent accepted, because while doing this she will also subscribe to the notion of chastity and morality. Which means along with a very limited space the genre allowed the themes allowed almost no space to say anything different from the mainstream. This could be one of the reasons why women opted to write prose during the Progressive period both in Kannada and Hindi. They preferred prose to the compact space offered by the poetry to render their expressions. It looks as if they subvert the notion of space associated with them through their preference to write prose. Therefore their not writing poetry should also be considered as a form of resistance. When given a chance to express, they definitely preferred to talk about their plight in an elaborate manner, loudly and in detail so that their grief and sorrows could be heard by the whole world. With the new wave of modernism women again started writing poetry.

Literary Modernism and Women's Writing:

Kannada Literary Modernism is represented by the *Navya* Movement while Hindi Literary Modernism stretches across *Prayogvaad* the Experimental Poetry, *Nayi-Kavita* and *A-Kavita* Movements. Modernism politically celebrates liberal democracy and highlights the individualistic experience of the middle-class male, the aspirations and ideologies of the Indian educated middle class.

‘*Pragathisheela*’ or the progressive movement in Karnataka was followed by ‘*Navya*’.⁷² According to ‘*Navya*’ or the Modernist writers, the chaos and confusion which resulted from the political situation in the post-independence period, with the development of capitalistic tendencies and dehumanisation have paved the way for the emergence of modernism. The modernists believed that with specific qualities and special use of language, literature has the unique ability to express knowledge of the other disciplines in its own way. Literature enjoyed the highest status during the modernist era which no other discipline had till then occupied in the Kannada socio-political scenario. The main thrust of the Modernist poetry in Kannada and Hindi was similar. Both considered literature as something special and autonomous.

The poetry scene especially during this period was dominated by male writers who moulded language, imagery and presentation to suit their expressions and marginalized the social questions raised by various writers in their texts including women. Along with a number of other issues raised by the Romantic/Nationalist and the Progressive movements, questions addressing social

issues raised by women writers during this period were completely marginalized. Established critics attached no great significance to issues related to women and did not respect women's writing.

In the case of Hindi '*Tar Saptak*', the collection of poems by seven poets edited by Ajneya and published in 1943 made a big difference to the Hindi poetry scenario. Poets of this anthology were determined to experiment both with the content and form of poetry. *Tar Saptak* heralded the beginning of *Prayogvad* and was considered as a representative poetry of this literary movement. No woman poet was included in this anthology. According to Namvar Singh, an established Hindi critic, *Tar Saptak* stressed on the 'search of a new path', whereas *Doosra Saptak* brought out in 1951 stressed on the 'search for the self'.⁷³ Another eminent Hindi critic, Bachan Singh opines that, with the publication of *Doosra Saptak*, *Pryogvaad* got transformed into *Nayi Kavita*.⁷⁴ *Doosra Saptak* was a representative anthology of poetry of the new movement, *Nayi Kavita* blended the qualities of *Pragativaad* and *Prayogvaad*. The only woman poet included in *Doosra Saptak* was Shakunt Mathur. Shakunt Mathur the only woman poet of the much praised *Doosra Saptak* says that though she has written umpteen number of poems, she never considered herself to be a poet and never took her writings seriously. Her husband too took her writing lightly and ignored its importance. Even then whenever she managed to write poetry, she compared it with the profound writings of her husband and felt inferior.⁷⁵ '*Chandni Chunar*' (Medicinal powder in Silver) and '*Abhi aur Kuch*' (A little more) are two collections of poems by Shakunt Mathur. *Teesra Saptak*, the third anthology of seven poets, was published in 1959. Poems by Krithi Chudhary were included in

this anthology. '*Khule Asmaan ke Neeche*' (Under the Open Sky) is her poetry collection. The three *Saptaks* represent the concerns of the *Prayogvaad* and the *Nayi Kavita* movements. These representations were mainly dominated by the concerns of the male poets and their views of the world. Another name needs mentioning among the Hindi women poets of the nineteen fifties is Kanta. Kanta was associated with the editorial board of the reputed Hindi literary magazine '*Kalpana*', a bi-monthly published from Hyderabad. Her poems, articles and criticisms were published in various Hindi literary magazines of that time. Kanta is a well-known name in the field of Hindi literature. Her Hindi translations of the poems by Anna Akhmatova the Russian poet was published in '*Tanav*', edited by Vanshi Maheshwari. '*Jo Kuch Bhi Dekhti Hum*'⁷⁶ (Whatever I See) and '*Samyaateet*'⁷⁷ (Beyond Time) are the two collections of poetry by Kanta. '*Kanta Geet Smriti*',⁷⁸ '*Kaavyaakaar Ek*'⁷⁹ and '*Kaavyaakaar Do*'⁸⁰ three anthologies of poems by Kanta have been published posthumously. Apart from some of these women whom the main stream poetry had to consider, there were many other women whose poems and writings got published but failed to get as much attention as they deserved. Some of the issues of '*Kalpana*' published in 1955 support this view. Indira Nupur's poem⁸¹ was published in the August issue, poems by Vidyavati Kokila, Vidyavati Mishra and Shakunt Mathur were published in the September issue. '*Khali Frame*' (An Empty Frame) a play by Vidyavati Kokila and poems by Kirti Chudhary were published in the October issue⁸² and a poem by Rama Singh was published in the December issue⁸³ of '*Kalpana*'. This proves that even though women writers, especially women poets writing in Hindi, actively wrote and published their writings in various established literary magazines they were never recognised in a major way like

their male colleagues. *Nayi Kavita* was followed by various major and minor literary movements like *A-Kavita*, *Naxalwadi Kavita*, *Janwadi Kavita*, *Yuva Kavita* and many more. As said earlier, Mona Gulati was the one and the only woman poet associated with the short-lived *A-Kavita* movement. Apart from this, none of the movements recognised poetry by women nor allowed any space for women's expressions. The concerns of all these literary movements mainly remained patriarchal.

Women had already entered into certain social spaces and their demands though not met completely, at least were heard and were also met to some extent. After a long pause maintained during the second half of the movement of self-expression, once again we see women writing poetry during the late sixties, which later took a definite form during the late seventies, drawing attention towards gender inequality with more clarity. Critics popularised the notion that women could do no 'serious writing' and had failed to write 'good poetry'.

Late sixties was the period when women started getting organized. Organizations popularly known as '*Mahila Samajas*', showed up in big cities and smaller towns in Karnataka. Sewing classes, cookery classes, English speaking classes, embroidery and painting classes, etc., were conducted for women in these places, either free of cost or with a minimal fee. *Mahila Samajas* had their own libraries where novels by women writers like Triveni, Anupama Niranjana, M.K.Indira, H.S.Parvathi, Saisuthe, Usha Navaratnaram and many others were available in abundance along with other popular magazines, fiction and thrillers. In the context of *Mahila Samajas*, though literary events were also given some

space among other activities, it did not gain utmost importance as one of the main agendas. Since literature was an independent entity for Modernists, literary scenario under the *Navya* reign stayed away from what was happening outside literature. As writing by women was directly associated with women's life, it was always treated as something that was part of the day-to-day life and not "literature". Apart from *Mahila Samajas*, women's activist's organisations, which were more dynamic in voicing their protest against the atrocities on women also showed up in various parts of the State. Seventies was the time when women's movement was taking a shape and gradually spread to various parts of the country taking different shapes and forms.

The Movement of Identity Politics (1980 onwards):

The *Bandaya* and the *Dalita* movements emerged as a reaction to the *Navya* or the Modernist movement. G. S. Amur a senior critic from Kannada says,

Unlike the *Navya* movement which had a strong streak of pessimism, the new movements are inspired by a positive vision derived from Marxism and indigenous ideologies like Lohia-vaad and Ambedker-vaad. Both these movements are protest and pro-people movements. They reject the dominant cultures and elitist conceptions of literature. They assert their identities and rights.⁸⁴

Baragooru Ramachandrappa, Siddalingaiah, Devanooru Mahadeva, Aravinda Malagatti, Candrashekar Patil are some of the important names among them.

Much has been said about *Bandaya* and *Dalita* movements. The *Bandaya* and the *Dalit* writers were sensitive to women issues. But they too saw women either as oppressed or as *Dalits* and not as women beyond those identities. Either class or caste always prioritised gender in the context of both the movements. On the other hand, K.V.Tirumalesh pioneered a set of writers who deviated from the Modernist tradition in their style and approach. H.S.Shiva Prakash, Jayanth, and a few women writers like Vaidehi, Sarvamangala, Sa.Usha, highly influenced by the *Navya* were also writing. They were lucky enough to get due attention from the main stream. Things were happening simultaneously. In the eighties various small groups such as women, dalits, minorities, both linguistic and religious started questioning the all-pervasive notion of Indian Nationalism and its literature. New class/caste configurations of these groups began to emerge after the eighties. In this context, in the place of a monolithic ‘Nation’ and ‘Literature’, diverse ways of understanding our society and culture gained significant ground.

One of the reasons for women’s writing not getting recognition could be due to the non-recognition of the differences among women. The notion of universal womanhood attributed qualities common to all women and thereby specificities of the issues concerned with women got subdued. Also issues related to women were isolated from other social milieu in which women had no direct participation. Therefore, when other issues are in the forefront, their relationship with ‘women’ and their lives automatically remains unnoticed or becomes less important or something not to be considered under any other slot apart from its own. This prevailing attitude in the socio-cultural scenario is reflected in almost

all realms of society. Archana Varma in her article, 'Women voices in Identity Discourse', points out that,

Dalit, religious, and now women identities have emerged as new streams of self-representations. Dalit identity has a caste ridden society to fight with, which they call the '*Manuvaadi* society'. The minorities have the majorities to oppose, which they call as religious fundamentalist society. It is so ridiculous that women's community in general is considered to have men alone in opposition.....⁸⁵

Thus, when women are considered as a homogenous group, they are displaced from their original identities and differences say, for example, caste and class differences. Such formations also are convenient patriarchal arrangements, which consider women as a homogenous group that can be dominated by another homogenous group, the 'men'. This leads towards a tendency to ignore the diversities and the complexities present among women belonging to different classes, castes and with different concerns, arising from different regional and economic backgrounds. Therefore, 'Women representation', most of the times, remains inappropriate. Literature is no exception. Tradition of literary histories did not consider works by women writers' worth including or reviewing. In the later period, some consideration was shown by piling up samples of their writings and was slotted as "Literature by women".

The post eighties witnessed crucial changes in women's poetry in Kannada as well as in Hindi. Placed in a colonial/post-colonial situation,

women's poetry has gone through '*double colonization*',⁸⁶ both from outside and within the Indian literary contexts. Contemporary poetry written by women in Kannada and Hindi is an attempt to address various questions arising out of these contexts.

Gender politics determines women's writing. Women's writing in recent years is oriented more towards women-centred issues voicing their demands and specifications. Recent writing by women draw attention towards gender inequality with more clarity. A shift from universal spaces to gender/class/caste-specific spaces can be traced in the poetry of the nineties.

At this juncture, women's re-consideration of their consciousness and the refashioning of the woman's 'self' can be understood as a reaction to the exclusion they experienced all through out in the history of the literary tradition of Kannada and Hindi. Sarvamangala, Hema, Vaidehi, Vijaya Dabbe, Bhanu Mushtaq, Malathi Pattanashetty, Kamala Hemmige, Mukhtayakka, Savitha Nagabhushan, Sa.Usha, Pushpa, Pratibha, Saraswathi and many more poets writing in Kannada articulate along these lines. Similarly Katyayani, Archana Varma, Indu Jain, Anamika, Snehmayi Chaudhari, Gagan Gill, Teji Grover and others writing in Hindi also voice similar concerns.

Kannada novels like '*Chandragiriya Teeradalli*' by Sara Abubekar, '*Asprashyaru*' by Vaidehi, '*Stree Loka*' by Savitha Nagabhushana, and '*Shivaganga*' by Champavathi and Hindi novels like '*Idannamama*' by Maitreyee Pushpa, '*Katgulab*' by Mridula Garg, '*Chinnamasta*' by Prabha Khetan and '*Mai*' by Gitanjalishree are some of the examples of their endeavour to recreate

women's world with enormous details drawn from day to day life situations and activities of women. While established critics of main stream Kannada and Hindi have failed to understand the concerns of feminism, women critics like Vijaya Dabbe, Sumitra Bai, Tejaswini Niranjana, Simanthini Niranjana from Kannada and Suman Raje, Mrinal Pande, Nirmala Jain, Katyayani, Anamika and Prabha Khetan from Hindi are writing on women's issues and the relevance of literature produced by them. Critics following this trend have tried to understand Literature through a feminist perspective. By eighties with a background of the *dalita*, *bandaya*, *A-Kavita*, *Yuva Kavita* and the larger women's movement predominant in the social scenario, women's literature in general and women's poetry in particular, emerges as an important form in Kannada and Hindi literatures.

¹ S. Malathi. "Ammanige", in *Helabekenisiddu*. Bangalore: Ila Prakashana, 2001. My translation.

² Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha. eds. *Women Writing in India 600 B.C. To The Present* (in two volumes). Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 9

³ for more details see. Partha Cheterjee. “The Nation and Its Women” in Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Delhi: OUP, 1994.

⁴ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds. *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*. Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989, p. 9

⁵ *ibid.* p. 10

⁶ Geetanjalisree, *Mai*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2002. p. 194

⁷ Sumathi Ramaswamy. “Virgin Mother, Beloved Other”, in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan. ed. *Gender in the Making: Indian Context*. Amsterdam: Nanjade Press, Spring 1997, p.11.

⁸ Fransesca Orsini. *The Hindi Public Sphere- 192-1940. Language and Literature in the age of Nationalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 253

⁹ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, 1989, p. 9

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 10

¹¹ Partha Cheterjee. 1994. p. 244

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Fransesca Orsini, p. 244

¹⁴ Anantha Padmanabha Rao. 'Aadhunika Agnyaata Kavayatriyaru', in *Agnyaata Kavayitriyaru*. Bangalore: Lekhakiyara Sangha, 1984, pp. 60-74

¹⁵ Karnataka Nandini, magazine for women started in 1916 was active till 1920. Sanmaargadarshini, was specially for the youth and was started in 1922.

¹⁶ Chi.Na.Mangala, *Tirumalamba*. Bangalore: Kannada Sahithya Parishat, 1991, pp. 28-31

¹⁷ Shivarama Padikkal. *Naadu Nudiya Ruupaka: Rashtra, Aadhunikate Mattu Kannadada Modala Kaadambarigalu*. Mangalore: Mangalore University, 2001, p. 131

¹⁸ -----, 2001, p. 129

¹⁹ *Karnataka Nandini*, vol.3. issue.3. Jan 1920, pp. 16-17

²⁰ Chi.Na. Mangala. 1991

²¹ -----, 1991, pp. 10-11. Tr. Chaitra

²² Shivarama Padikkal. 2001, p. 128

²³ for more details see Masti Venkatesha Iyengar. "Satihitaishini Granthamaale", in *Vimarshe-1*. Bangalore: Jeevana Karyaalaya, 1965, pp.

²⁴ Sheshagirirao, L.S., ed. *Srimathi Nanjanagudu Tirumalamba Jeevana Mathu Sahitya*. Bangalore: IBH Prakashana, 1987 p. 32

²⁵ K. Ramaswamy Iyengar. 'Baalika Shikshana', in 'Krishnasookthi' (Vol III, No.10, ed. Kerodi Subba Rao, N. Rajagopalakrishna Rao, Dharma Prakashana Press, Mangalore, 1907, pp.138-140. Emphasis is in the original.

²⁶ Seemanthini Niranjana and Tejaswini Niranjana Tr. in Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha. eds. *Women Writing in India 600 B.C. To The Present* (in two volumes). Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.

²⁷ *Karnataka Nandini*. vol.3, issue.3. February 1920, pp. 3-7

²⁸ *History of Legislature: The Mysore Representative Assembly Vol III (1924-1940)*

²⁹ *Karnataka Nandini*. vol.3, issue.3. February 1920, p. 5

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ ibid. pp. 8-10

³² *Veeramathe*, vol.11, issue.3. August 1962.

³³ *Karnataka Nandini*. February 1920, p. 8

³⁴ Editorial, *Karnataka Nandini*.

³⁵ Chi.Na Mangala. 1991, pp. 76-77. My translation.

³⁶ -----, 1991, pp. 76. My translation.

³⁷ -----, 1991, pp. 76. My translation.

³⁸ -----, 1991, pp. 75. My translation.

³⁹ R.S. Mugali. *Kannada Sahityada Itihasa* New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1963, p. 203

⁴⁰ 'Karnataka Nandini' and 'Veeramathe' were magazines in Kannada edited by Tirumalamba.

⁴¹ Anantha Padmanabha Rao. 1984, p. 63

⁴² In 1938, she established Akhila Karnataka Makkala Koota in Bangalore. It is a place where children from all social classes can participate in the activities. In 1932 Government recognised the work of R. Kalyanamma towards the upliftment of children and appointed her as a woman representative for the City School Board. In 1933 she was appointed as a Bench Magistrate in Bangalore, where she served for fifteen years.

⁴³ B.N. Sumitrabai. *Kalyana Saraswathi*. Bangalore: Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha, 1992, p. 54

⁴⁴ Smt Gauradevi Inchalmutt's presidential address was published in 'Saraswathi', a Kannada magazine edited by R. Kalyanamma, Vol.28, Issue.5, May 1949.

⁴⁵ Francesca Orsini. *The Hindi Public Sphere- 1920-1940. Language and Literature in the age of Nationalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 244

⁴⁶ -----, 2002, p. 246

⁴⁷ -----, 2002, p. 253

⁴⁸ see Veer Bharat Talwar. 'Feminist consciousness in women's journals in Hindi', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. 1989 and 'Widening Concerns: Hindi Women's Journals' in see Francesca Orsini. 2002

⁴⁹ http://www.geocities.com/dakshina_kan_pa/art31/women6.htm

⁵⁰ Fransesca Orsini. 2002, p. 252

⁵¹ Ramdarash Mishra, "Poetry of the Post Romantic Era", in Nagendra. '*History of Hindi Literature*'. Noida: Mayur Paperbacks, 1973. p. 539

⁵² Nemichandra Jain. ed. *Muktibodh Rachanavali: Collected works of Gajanan Muktibodh*. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1985. p. 396. My translation.

⁵³ -----, 1985. p. 396 Tr. Chaitra.

⁵⁴ Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha. 1993. pp. 419-420

⁵⁵ Mahadevi Varma. *Shrunkala ki kadiyan*. Allahabad: Lok Bharati Prakashan, 1999, pp. 9-10 and p. 18 Tr. Fasiha. M Phil dissertation submitted to CALTS, University of Hyderabad. 2003

⁵⁶ **SAWNET; South Asian Women's NETwork**

⁵⁷ Year of publication: *Nihar* (1930), *Rashmi* (1932), *Neeraja* (1934), *Sandhya Geet* (1936), *Deepshika* (1942) and *Neelambara* (1983).

⁵⁸ Elisabeth Bumiller. *May you be the mother of hundred sons* A journey among the women of India. New delhi: Penguin Books, 1991, pp19-20.

⁵⁹ 'Navodaya' is a period of high romanticism in Kannada.

⁶⁰ Nemichandra. ed. *Belagere Janakamma – Baduku Baraha*. Bangalore: Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha, 1988, p. 1

⁶¹ From '*Kalyana*', Janakamma's first anthology of poems, in Nemichandra, 1988, p. 58. My translation.

⁶² Nemichandra, 1988, p. 77. My translation.

⁶³ -----, 1988, p. 78. My translation.

⁶⁴ -----, 1988, p. 120. Tr. Chaitra.

⁶⁵ -----, 1988, p. 1. Tr. Chaitra.

⁶⁶ Belagere Janakamma lived in Ballary which was then a hot seat of literary activities. Sree Murugharajendra Swami of Chitradurga Mutt proposed to finance the publication of Janakamma's first anthology of poems, '*Kalyana*'. Shrat Agencies in Bangalore came forward to publish the book. Masti, Rajaratnam and other literary dignitaries who visited Ballary made it a point to meet Janakamma. Her poem '*moRe*' was published by Masti in his literary journal '*Jeevana*'. People of Belagere knew her as 'Janakamma who writes poems'.

⁶⁷ For more details see '*Ooleyaada KavanagaLu*' (poems that became the letters), Nemichandra. 1988, pp. 157-170

⁶⁸ "Sthree Purusharu Sari Samaanaru", translation of an article from the magazine Theosophist was published in *Saraswathi*. vol.35. issue. 10. 1955.

⁶⁹ Women actively participated in the social movement of the 12th century, said to have led by Basavanna, in Karnataka. This movement gave space for the common people, who gave their opinions regarding the social, spiritual and philosophical states of the society through their compositions called Vacanas. They were all in Kannada language. Vacanas came in the form of revolt against the dominant power structures like the Sanskrit, the Brahminical, the Later, Vacanas were appropriated by literature. Apart from Akka Mahadevi, Soole Sangavva,

Ammugeya Raayamma, Kaalavve, Rechavve, Goggavve and many more women in a large number contributed vacanas.

⁷⁰ Pragatisheela Movement came up as a critique of the romantic Navodaya movement in Kannada.

⁷¹ Seemanthini Niranjana. "Themes of Femininity: Notes on the world of women's fiction", in *New Quest*. Vol 74, March-April 1989.

⁷² 'Navya' or the literary modernism ruled the intellectual scene with an imperialistic approach and embodied experiences catering to the male world. Individual seems to be the center of expression and concern about serious threat to individuality was the central theme. Men dominated the poetry scene especially during this period.

⁷³ Namvar Singh. *Kavita ke Naye Pratiman*. Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1968, p. 94.

⁷⁴ Singh, Bachchan. "Hindi Sahitya Ka Doosara Itihas", Delhi: Radha Krishna Prakashan Private Limited, 2000, p. 423.

⁷⁵ Suman Raje, 'The Creative World of The Contemporary Women Poets', in Virendra Singh. *Samkalin Kavita*, Jaipur: Panchsheel Prakashan, 1987, pp. 108 - 109.

⁷⁶ Kanta. *Jo Kuch Bhi Dekhti Hum*. Hyderabad: Navhind Prakashan, 1960

⁷⁷ ----- . *Samyaateet*. Hyderabad: Navhind Prakashan, 1964

⁷⁸ Prabha Kanoria. ed. *Kanta Geet Smriti*. Hyderabad: Aam Prakashan, 1995

⁷⁹ ----- ed. *Kaavyaakaar Ek*. Hyderabad: Aam Prakashan, 1996

⁸⁰ ----- ed. *Kaavyaakaar Do*. Hyderabad: Aam Prakashan, 1996

⁸¹ Indira Nupur, 'Bahut chali mein' (I have travelled enough) *Kalpana*. ed. Aryendra Sharma. Vol. August 1955. Hyderabad: Navhind Publication. p. 44

⁸² Vidyavati Kokila. 'Khali Frame'. Kirti Chaudhary. 'Four Poems'. *ibid* Vol October, 1955, p. 2 and p. 54.

⁸³ Rama Singh. 'Anuttarta' (Unanswerability), *ibid*. Vol. December 1955, p. 65

⁸⁴ G.S. Amur. "Modern Kannada Poetry" in *Essays on Modern Kannada Literature*. Bangalore: Karnataka Sahithya Academi, 2001, p. 14

⁸⁵ Archana Varma. 'Women voices in Identity Discourse'. in 're-defining modernity', in *Samkaaleen Srijan*. ed. Shambunath. Calcutta: Vani Prakashan. Issue, 21. 2002, p. 206. My translation.

⁸⁶ Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford. eds. *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing*. Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1986

READING THROUGH PREFACES

That which I saw
that which I heard
that I had experienced
all that is yours!
everything!
is for you
recorded in the pages of history.
Then what did I see?
What did I experience?
What should I document....?

- Saraswathi Du

“What should I Document ?”¹

Henedare Jedanante

This chapter discusses the very act of writing by women and the canonisation of contemporary women's poetry. It looks into how poetry by women emerged in a major way, not just as part of literature but also as a voice of resistance from one of the marginalized groups in society. The chapter examines

how forewords written by men for the poetry collections of women contribute to restrict women's poetry within the frames of femininity and womanhood, qualities prescribed to them by the patriarchal society. It probes into the meaning that women's writing has for these men and how these forewords result in the canonising of women's literature in general and women's poetry in particular. Resistance to such canonisations is identified in the forewords written by women and in the prefaces written by the women poets included in their poetry collections.

Except for writers in the early centuries, most of the women in the twentieth century chose to write prose. As said earlier, they incorporated problems faced by women as individuals. When women realised that their problems sprung from the operations of patriarchies they wrote to bring to light the operators of these patriarchies. Along with this, voices questioning men and the male dominance started surfacing in women's literature. Till the seventies women made their presence felt as novelists and short story writers by and large in both Kannada and Hindi. Later they gradually joined mainstream poetry floating their joys, miseries, agonies and splendour and spreading as they flowed with the current. Women's writing has emerged as a visible and significant literary movement in the nineties of the twentieth century.

Though the practice of writing poems was not new, "Women's Poetry" in real sense began to emerge in Kannada and Hindi only in the seventies. Literary Modernism in its heydays, during the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century, marginalized questions addressing the social issues raised by women

writers within the framework of its ideology. Now for the first time women cleared space for themselves where, as individuals, they could express their experiences associated with their body and sexuality in their writings. In her essay 'Feminist, Female, Feminine', Toril Moi opines that,

Since patriarchy has always tried to silence and repress women and women's experience, rendering them visibly, is clearly an important anti-patriarchal strategy.²

In poetry, like in all other writings, women poets attempt to re-establish their identity as women. They worked towards a better representation of their self in literature/poetry.

By the early eighties women began to write extensively and a new kind of women's writing began to emerge. *Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha*³ (Women Writers' Association of Karnataka) was started on the 6, January 1979, for many writers felt that a forum to voice women's writing and bring women writers together under one roof was essential. '*Kavana Saurabha*'⁴ was the first representative anthology of Kannada women poets, published by *Lekhakiyara Sangha* in the year 1984. It is an anthology consisting of forty-seven poets. Some poems in this collection are composed using traditional meters with conventional themes. '*Jai Bharata*'⁵, a poem by Tirumale Rajamma follows a perfect *Chandassu*, the Kannada metrical composition to express patriotic feeling towards Mother India. Kamala Ham Pa Na uses the 12th century *vachana* form of poetry⁶ to put across the crisis faced by a contemporary woman in her interaction with other people and her day-to-day life in general. Those poems that reread the

mythological women characters from a contemporary perspective⁷ are interesting. There are poems on poverty and dreams and aspirations of women. The poems in this anthology ranging from patriotism go to question injustice, oppression and other social evils. Apart from this, there are poems that express feelings towards a healthy man-woman relationship. This was the period when women's writing was taking shape as an independent and a special genre. The anthology '*Kavana Saurabha*' is an attempt in the process, to bring together women writing in Kannada. On the other hand, Kannada literary criticism was trying to understand and analyse writing by women in its own manner. Most of the critics in Kannada were mainly men. A tendency to relate poetry by women with experiences of women or 'specifically women experiences' was popular. Poetry by women was understood within the already subscribed notions of femininity. Therefore Kannada literary criticism was looking for an essentially feminine womanhood in the poems penned by women poets.

The very act of writing by women signifies that they pronounce their ideas in the public space. Writing also signifies their attempt to move beyond the spaces allotted to them. Women who are supposed to belong to the inward spaces of the society, make their presence felt in the spaces which had been restricted to them. In the process they document details of their experiences through their perspectives. The dos and don'ts subscribed to them in their day-to-day life extend to their writing as well. Therefore, when women write their writing is associated with their life. Whether their writing is factual or fictional, it is read as autobiographical. When a woman writes, a tendency to read it as 'autobiographical' is quite common in the context of Kannada and Hindi

literatures. Here, certain issues addressed in her writings always get priority and this attitude towards women's expressions act as a kind of a social censorship imposed on women writers. This kind of an attitude in turn defines women's writing in general. Even then, women dared to write violating the censorships imposed on them at every step both as a person and as a creative writer. Though women through their writings, succeeded in bringing the 'private' into the 'public', to a greater extent they also succeeded writing without disturbing their private life. To some extent, poetry as a form helped them to do this. The visual patterns, rhythm, sounds, metaphors and the images that constitute poetry gave them an opportunity to move away from the reality whenever they wanted to. They could camouflage the real issues. The hard reality of their lives could appear in their poetry taking different forms. As an act of breaking such censorships, some women poets deliberately wrote on a very personal note, for e.g., Hema Pattanashetty, Champavathi and Pratibha in Kannada. Pratibha, a Kannada poet writes about her conversation with a male writer. Commenting on women's poetry he says:

women should not use words like breasts, intercourse, etc., in a very casual manner. If they did so, these words would loose their simulative qualities.

Reacting to this, Pratibha answered that she deliberately uses such terms in order to break the traditional role models and give new dimensions to expression.⁸

By the end of seventies, with the advent of feminism in India in general and in the Kannada context in particular, several questions regarding women's

rights and their position in society came to the forefront. Debates regarding gender issues were becoming more specific and central. The woman's self was reassessed by both, who identified their writing with the new trend of feminism and those who did not want to identify with it. Women writers had to negotiate between the roles they played within a defined patriarchal framework and the new awareness brought by the feminism. The activism of women's movements emerged in the late seventies and gained visibility, it is also responsible in changing the themes of women's expressions in literature. Therefore, in the post eighties an assertion of woman's self and a strong resistance to the prevailing patriarchies surface and become visible in women's writing.

The Forewords and After

It was only in the post eighties that the literary historians began to take note of women's writing in Kannada and in Hindi. On their part, women too wrote on women's writing in many Indian languages. Till then, literary histories barely recognized writing by women. History and literary history perceived from an upper caste, middle class male perspective represented an image of the ideal Indian woman. While arguing the case for women's writing, Dale Spender criticizes Ian Watt, the author of *The Rise of the Novel* and comments that the only reason why writings by women do not count in the histories of literatures is because it is *written by women*. She points out that,

The worth of women writers is not being based on any consideration of their writing, the only conclusion which can be drawn is their worth is being determined by their sex.⁹

The situation in India was no different from this. Though writing by women were recognized in a few places, men were always represented as more significant and better writers in literary histories. In a way, these literary histories segregated writing by women and were responsible for the rise of “women’s writing”, as against the main stream writing that constituted writing by men. Hence, many of the women writers who wished to join ‘mainstream literature’ usually went to an established male writer for an “introduction”. They entered the literary field sponsored by well-known writers and literary critics as is evident in the very structuring of the poetry collections brought out by women in recent years, especially in Kannada language.

There is something very interesting in the pattern in which poetry collections of women are structured. They usually have a foreword, and then a note by the poet on her poetry followed by the poems. The poet’s note speaks about the poet herself and the poems. In her note, most of the times the poet talks about herself in relation to her creativity and her creativity in relation to the society she lives in - the context in which she writes. Sometimes, the note comprises ideas that would later be extended in the poems.

Forewords are usually written by well-known writers/critics and carry their opinion about the collection of poems. A foreword often introduces the collection of poems, evaluates them and locates the collection in the specific context of a given literature and literary tradition. Usually the foreword writer advises the young poet on ways of improving his/her style of writing. It also identifies the uniqueness of the writer in question and explains how her poetry is different from

the other contemporaries. In a way, these forewords give us a glimpse of what the writer of the foreword thinks about the poet and her poetry. It is a meta-text on poetry in general and poems in the collection in particular. Moreover, the foreword is usually considered as important for it not only introduces the poet but also evaluates her work. In the instance of poetry by women, the opinion projected in the foreword gains much more importance, because, most of the times the foreword writer is a man. This is the case both in Kannada and Hindi. The forewords also put forth the ideas about women and womanhood. For example, some believe in 'essential womanhood', which considers that women have very specific experiences by virtue of their birth as women. Some consider that because women are citizens of this country they have the right to express their opinion and therefore women's writing is essential. Some also believe that because women are oppressed, their writing need to be given a voice. All these assumptions determine the forewords and indirectly contribute not only to the construction of the notion of "women's writing", but also towards the construction of essential womanhood. Therefore I shall choose a few forewords by the reputed writers or scholars in the Kannada and Hindi literatures, who, to some extent, are responsible for canonizing literature. If we go through these forewords and interpret them, we will have a picture of what the mainstream thinks of women's poetry. This helps to gather ideas about their notion of poetry in general, poetry by women and women as poets in particular. We get to know what these writers would prescribe for women and what kind of poetry they expect from them. To begin with, I would first look at some of the forewords in Kannada. Then pick a few forewords from Hindi and support my argument.

Gopalakrishna Adiga the pioneer of the Modernist poetry in Kannada has specific views about how a poem should be written. According to him, along with creativity, skill and craftsmanship are essential qualities for a poem. Adiga expressed his reservations about the new breed of Kannada poets. He was of the opinion that younger poets do not care for craftsmanship. Instead, they arrange bits and pieces of bad prosaic lines one below the other and call them as poems. He believed:

Meter is as important to poetry as grammar is to the language.....

Verses framed in chaste Kannada, with a flawless rhythm are the life of a poem.¹⁰

Adiga apart from being a major Modernist poet was one of the important critics of the *Navya* period. The Modernists critics insisted on a close reading of the text. The text, one that is printed on a page, was an object in itself with its own quality and should be explored in its own terms. Adiga stressed on the “quality” and “creativity”, whether the poet is a man or a woman did not matter to him.

If this is the stance of Adiga and a number of others who followed his path, there are scholars and writers for whom while writing forewords the poet’s gender did matter. They differentiated the poetry by women from poetry in general. Poetry by women was viewed in the context of essential womanhood and femininity. Some such forewords from both Kannada and Hindi are looked at in the dissertation.

In the foreword to the collection of poems *Virahotsava*, by Hema Pattanashetty, Shanker Mokashi Punekar says that one need not give any kind of concession to this poetry collection only because it is by a woman writer. He says:

Her poetry rightfully wins our appreciation by its effortless, flawless considerations to femininely non-sensitive reading and criticism..... It is true that women's literature in Kannada has begun to grow. But in this flourishing genre quality of femininity is very less. It is true that women writers penned several poems, novels, and plays. But the quality of their feminineness is not evident in these works. It is not as if our writers do not have these qualities. They have not utilized it in their writings in a proper way. The reason for this may be in the view that, 'men's way is the right way of expressing'.¹¹

Further he goes on to define the qualities of 'feminineness', by mentioning the movement of the foetus in the womb as an example Hema's poems manage to bring out women's feelings about *puberty, pregnancy, their desire for clothes and jewellery*, etc. According to Punekar, good poetry by women should express the experiences men will never be able to access. He feels that many women writers fail to express their "unique experiences" in their writings. By this he meant that, women writers for whom womanhood (being a female) was natural did not take advantage of their uniqueness of being women. Such an understanding is devoid of any distinction made between 'the female' and 'the feminine' aspects of womanhood. While the 'female' is a matter of nature, the 'feminine' is an effect of cultural construction. The feminine qualities that are generally attributed to

women are primarily historical and cultural and then are naturalized through the discourses of patriarchies. Femininity or the qualities that subscribe to the feminine subjection is imposed and not natural or gained by birth. The biologically acquired and socially attributed associations of womanhood are indeed juxtaposed. But women's writing is generally viewed through the tinted glass of the established notions of the female and the femininity. Women's poetry is expected to represent the 'docile' qualities of women for they are projected as 'the qualities that make a woman'. When the 'feminine' overlaps or gets merged with the 'female', the 'Feminine' represents nurture and 'Female' nature. As Toril Moi rightly points out,

Patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards of 'femininity' are *natural*. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labeled both *unfeminine* and *unnatural*.¹²

Streethva or 'the womanliness' in women is given utmost importance and remained as the core of discussion for quite sometime in Kannada and Hindi literary contexts. In a certain sense, the notion of *streethva* has redefined the 'modern woman'. However modern the woman is, she is expected to function within the limits of *streetva*. An elaborate list of dos and don'ts specially prescribed for women poets is a case in point. Different scholars and writers who analysed poetry by women promoted a range of ideas in different ways.

In a foreword to 'Eetanaka', (Untill Now) the collection of poems by Pratibha, V.K.Gokak says,

These are a few instances in the context of Kannada Literature where feminity has blossomed naturally. The poet has been successful in voicing such *natural feminity* and has succeeded in the difficult job of implanting it in her work. *She has not turned into a feminist*. She has proved that one can remain a feminine and still achieve all that a feminist would achieve. It is evident from such expressions that, a woman's personality is different from that of a man, but commands the same level of respect.¹³

Gokak's distinction between the feminist and the feminine allows him to construct a 'natural feminine' subject. According to him a woman is gifted with certain natural "womanly qualities" or natural woman-ness. He seems to believe that certain aspects of femininity are natural for women. Resistance to such, the so-called 'naturalness' is unacceptable. Gokak appreciates Pratibha's poems on these grounds. More stress is laid on the naturalness of certain feminine qualities of women. Therefore being feminist is seen as against being feminine. 'Feminine' is acceptable while the 'feminist' remains undesirable.

Expressions like '*woman's heart*' (a tender heart), '*woman's natural expression*', '*naturalness in her expression*', '*purely feminine consciousness*', etc., were produced abundantly to characterise poems by women poets. If one sees carefully, these tools used for the analyses of women's poetry, instead of seeing it

as an independent and a vibrant new expression, tried to restrain it within the traditional framework and impose patriarchal readings to it.

G.S.Shivarudhrappa, the well-known poet and a Kannada scholar, in his foreword to Sa.Usha's collection of poems, '*Ee Nelada Haadu*' (Song of This Earth), opines that Sanchi Honnamma and Mahadevi Akka are the two role models for women's poetry in Kannada. The 12th century *Veerashaiva* poet Akka Mahadevi and Sanchi Honnamma of the 17th century are two women icons of Kannada poetry. Akka Mahadevi's poems get a prominent place in the Kannada literary history. More than her poems, she is celebrated for leading a bold life that went against the traditional notions of womanhood; she is remembered for discarding her clothes and walking nude, for expressing the desire for another man/god, etc. Sanchi Honnamma of the 17th century receives recognition for celebrating womanhood in the traditional sense and arguing that women also are essential members of the society. Referring to Akka and Honnamma, Shivarudrappa says,

'Why lament over girl, oh! blind boors' was the bold accusing ever memorable voice of Honnamma's '*Hadibadeya Dharma*' (loyalty of a virtuous wife); basically this work propounds the *grihasta dharma* (the conjugal duties) without wishing for any kind of change in the framework of the Indian social and domestic set-up .

...

.....Akka's life which has brought dignity, respect and rare self consciousness to a women's personality of *boundless love*, is the most appropriate model (objective correlative) to a lot of poets.¹⁴

G.S.S further points out that though there are exceptions, most of the Kannada women novelists during the *Navodaya* period followed Sanchi Honnamma's path by writing within the traditional frame work of the family and the man-woman relationship, whereas, women writing during the modernist period, especially the poets, seem to follow Mahadevi Akka's path.

Ramachandra Sharma, one of the leading names among the *Navya* poets, in his foreword to *Attu Bide Gelathi* (Let Out Your Sorrow Friend), an anthology of poems by Sudha Sharma Chavatti, Savitha and Bhagavathi, writes:

The specialty of this anthology is that most of the poems here clearly show that they have been written by women and not by men. The manner in which these poems are written, the kinds of images and metaphors used, etc., naturally belongs to the women's world and are impossible for men to write. Femininity distinct to women is evident in the images conceptualised and reconstructed in the lines penned by Sudha Sharma and Savitha. Bhagavathi deliberately hides the aspects of femininity in her writings.¹⁵

To discuss the femininity or womanliness prevailing in women's writing seems to be the sole concern of some of these foreword writers.

The construction of the 'self' in women's writing is also dependant on the idea of the male self. H.S.Shivaprakash in his foreword to Pushpa's poetry collection, *Amruthamathi Swagatha* writes,

The notion of ‘self’ constructed in the elite poetry till date is the gendered self. It is not beyond gender and it is usually a masculine ‘I’.¹⁶

Feminist critics have always argued that it is important to ‘embark upon a revisionist re-reading of our entire literary inheritance’.¹⁷ Criticisms on women’s poetry have always complained that women poets did not write like women and no ‘woman experiences’ surfaced in their poems. Mogalli Ganesh, while reviewing the collection of poems, ‘*Kaada Navilina Hejje*’ by Mamta.G Sagar comments,

We cannot expect much from the writings of most women who live like women and write like men. These poets despite their familiarity with the life in the villages refuse to use anything at all about subjects like grinding stone, pounding rod, ‘*hase*’, the seats made with *rangoli* designs by women during special occasions, brooms, pipes used to blow and kindle fire in the traditional *chulahs*, or ‘*oLale*’, the traditional spoon used to feed milk for the babies, their bangles, toe rings, the flowers the men bring for them, etc. The contemporary women writers brought up in the villages and live in the cities neither write about their village experience nor about the contradictions they face in a city drawing room. They don’t even compose critical poetries on the ironies in well-furnished drawing rooms. If they continue this practice, women writing in Kannada will die an early death like the *Bandaya* poetry. The present day writers haven’t even learnt to write with a fraction

of the sensitivity that the twelfth century *vachana* writers had. That is why we have no great women poets among us till date, after Akkamahadevi.¹⁸

For Mogalli, womanhood is associated with traditional domesticity - the kitchen, family, motherhood, the role of a wife and the images highlighting all these become very important. As a critic, he expects that a good woman poet should rely on her own experiences and use images and metaphors related to her domesticity.

Women poets not only wrote about concrete realities that surrounded their day-to-day life, but also wrote about abstract feelings that emerged as a result of their conflict with practical situations in literature and life. Therefore women's choice of themes and the rendering of their poems along the lines of their male colleagues need to be understood not as their inability to express their individual views as women, but as a positive element that readily absorbs the influences available in a literature and culture, and as a response to the given situation.

Critics have also reviewed the mode of women's poetry. In his foreword to U. Maheshwari's poetry collection, *Mugila Hakki*, H.S.Raghavendra Rao points out,

Although these poems are personal on the basis of details, on the basis of objectives; they document the inevitable loneliness of all women. They express not only anxiety but also show impatience to overcome it.¹⁹

Let us consider Modernist poetry. Loneliness, anxiety, impatience, etc., were the celebrated themes of mainstream poetry both in Kannada and Hindi. So, what we see in Maheshwari is an attempt to be at par with the mainstream poetry in practicing the genre, handling its themes, moods and contents while expressing herself.

By the end of the eighties, with the influence of the Modernist poets, loud dialogues in women's poetry were replaced by lengthy monologue sort of poems. Referring to the monologue mode of poetry by women, Shivaprakash opines that most of the women poets are not trained enough to successfully use the monologue mode of writing poetry. Their poems look as though they are conversations and long lectures.

Among the women poets, some write to please masculinity by teasing men, or they compose kiddish poems on the moon and stars as if they are not born as men or women. Or they deliver sermons in a fake male voice. Women's poetry is devoid of deep contemplation. Hence, the loud conversational mode. The poetry of today clearly shows that women have no preparation and they lack introspection.²⁰

When the 'self' in the self-introspection itself is not clear, and that 'self' in women's poetry is still a male self all these attempts have to be understood as challenges to stay at par with the mainstream.

The 'self' or the 'I' element that appears in women's writing reviewed the 'woman' that emerged from the mainstream literature/poetry. H.L.Pushpa says,

Myself and the words within me have become a kind of mysterious world. As the words emerge, as they become poetry, I am gradually lost, often having had to search myself. The truth within my poem many a times is the truth within me; still unsuccessful to dissociate from the poem. Amruthamathi, Madhavi, Akkamahadevi still compel me to think. I keep stumbling on appropriate dimensions to think of them. This is the time where one should read positively the manifestation of woman's mind.²¹

Women poets moved towards this 'woman' with whose self they identified their own. The realization of this, gave a valid breakthrough. This tendency gave a turn to their writing where their idiom headed towards self-oriented and highly individualistic expressions. That in turn strengthened women's poetry as a genre, which thrived at par with the mainstream domain of male poets.

Poetry by women in eighties and the nineties is an interesting phase, as women resist their portrayal in the mainstream literature. The poems of this phase are self-critical and criticize male gaze in constructing women in life and literature. '*Bhandaru*', a poem by Sarvamangala is as following:

I'm not scared of
the stray cows and bulls
who recoil their tails when
hushed or stared at;

I'm scared of those *linga bhakta*
Brothers who say –
A woman's intelligence
doesn't lie below her knees,
so come forward like Akka.
I'm scared of these lords
Who glance over the
rise and fall
as they talk, and think
how about moving hands,
and experience pleasure from within. . .²²

In contemporary Kannada poetry, the central objective of women's poetry is to resist. Resisting the phallogocentric view is predominantly present in the poems. Their tone is sharp and direct. They criticise and condemn the patriarchal system. Resistance is shown to the set standards within which women's poetry is expected to operate.

I like to consider my pen a friend rather than a weapon. I have no inhibition or hesitance to speak to her. She is clever enough to open up my insides for me. When we talk among ourselves, we feel as if someone is stealthily listening to us and laughing. Only because someone is listening to us, do we need to hide the truth and start speaking the way that would please them?²³

– asks U. Maheshwari. Writing gives her the strength to speak without any inhibition.

Vague gestures of women's poetry pointing to each and everything gradually started gaining focus in the late eighties and the early nineties towards specific gender issues. Till then women did not even have the freedom to speak about their opinion of men and masculinity. This was a period when they talked abundantly about their own sexuality. The body and its desires became central themes for many poets. They strongly questioned the objectification of women's body in literature, in common understanding and in the representation of women writers in the literary histories.

While talking about the contemporary situation in Kannada poetry and the reaction of criticism in literature towards women's poetry in particular, Pratibha says:

If there is anything new happening in Kannada Poetry, it is only in women's poetry.... They are bringing out those unseen layers of the heart and laying them out string by string. Men are not even reacting to our feminist sisters, wives and mothers. Their heroines are still the same old role models. If the poems are little bold, they are labelled as feminist poems. If they are a bit romantic then they are called feminine. Women's poetry in Kannada means, poems by the 12th century Akka Mahadevi to begin with, then it will be Sanchi Honnamma of the 17th century and then place us, the 21st century poets along with them. Kannada Poetry in general does not even include Allama Prabhu of 12th century. Instead, it begins right away with Adiga.²⁴

G.S.Amur in one of his articles says the actual criticism for women's poetry in Kannada came out in the form of forewords, which I think is very true.

He says,

Established male poets who wrote the forewords not only guided the young women poets about writing poetry but also imposed their expectations of what kind of poetry they expected from women. Usually all foreword writers take special interest in recognizing the feminine qualities in poems by women poets.²⁵

This attitude of the male writers sometimes has been harmful for women poetry. Amur establishes this by saying,

Since it is necessary to provide a natural expression of femininity, for any poet to be authentic, there is not much importance from the point of view of experience. But there is always a danger of women verbalizing and exhibiting their femininity as a result of male expectations. Bad poems are produced when they get into such danger.²⁶

When men reviewed women's poetry images associated with women's daily life emerged was branded as 'kitchen literature'. No space was given to poetry by women because they felt that the women poets only talked of experiences limited to a small group and not of the 'universal reality'. If women wrote about the so-called 'universal reality', it was criticised that they never wrote 'like women'. On one hand, women were expected to respond to the happenings around them and on the other, their right to speak about experiences in general

were restricted and it was taken for granted that they would not react to anything else except the domestic experiences which are exclusively theirs.

Nineties seem to be an interesting phase for women's poetry in Hindi as well. In the foreword to the collection of poems, '*Lauta Hai Vijayta*', by Archana Varma, it is said that,

...The so-called women's world is not available as a concrete realization. The constantly evolving, growing and extending nature is called the women's world. It is like the tenacity to fit in her huge family into the tiny courtyard and the determination to widen her tiny courtyard in that huge family. Such an effort reflects both resistance and acceptance.²⁷

Perhaps the above-mentioned words are applicable to most of the women's poetry of the nineties.

Dr. Hardayal, a Hindi critic, finds the poems in Sunita Jain's collection of poems, '*Sutradhar Sothe Hai*' interesting because the poet does not follow the popular mode of women's poetry, she does not shout slogans nor her poems are mere play of words. Her poems have the inherent sensitivity of a *human mind*.²⁸ So, according to him, poetry by women will lose all its 'sensitivity' if it demands a space for women or represents women's voices. Poetry by women should qualify as 'poetry' and move beyond being 'just a play of words'. But on the other hand it should also know its limitations and not cross the barriers within which it has been set. In saying this, it is obvious that Dr. Hardayal is suggestive of

feminism. Shouting slogans, voicing one's demands, disagreeing or raising voices against something in one's writing is associated with feminism, which is hardly ever accepted by the main stream. Such remarks are made when Feminism is understood as something that distorts the idealness of Indian women. It is seen as a threat to the essential womanhood, which is full of 'feminine' qualities.

In the foreword written for '*Anushtup*', a collection of poems in Hindi, by Anamika, Kedarnath Singh says that the language in which this poet expresses herself stands differently from commonly existing language used by women writers, especially the feminists. He feels that she is distinct in this difference in articulation which stresses on the acceptance of a normative element. *Vidhi* and *Nishedh* (natural and the imposed), and the contradiction between the two, flow in her poems.²⁹ He seems to be critical about the 'common language of feminist writing' and appreciative of the normative elements in the anthology. He fails to understand that it is the force of the feminist perspective which gives strength to the compassion hidden in these poems.

Suresh Salil in his foreword to '*Saat Bhaiyon Ke Beech Champa*', a collection of poems in Hindi says,

The sociology, the void between dreams and reality, the ability and helplessness and the irrepressible aspirations of women's rights from time of *Rigveda* and *Manusmrithi*, till date are all expressed in Katyayini's poems.³⁰

He adds that the poet's liberal views about the most delicate stages of love, motherhood, life and nature are also expressed in her poems.

An interesting anthology of contemporary women's poetry in Hindi, '*Karunaa Aaye Magar Is Tarh Nahi*' was brought out during the Seventh National Women Studies Conference held at Jaipur in 1995. Editor of this anthology, Ajjju Dadda Mishra in her preface states,

It is true that women write less and those writing poetry are fewer.

Those who want to write are not able to write. Those who write are not publishing. Those published are not discussed.....

.....the desire to achieve world view bearing feminist dreams, the struggle for it, the exertion, suffocation, anxiety, loss, gain and the joy are all hidden in the women's literature of this day.³¹

Ajantha Dev in her foreword for the same anthology finds that women's poetry has diverged into two different streams –

If the first stream was of poets writing about love and romance, sadness and separation and everything pretty; the second stream is of poets very openly writing in a fiercely attacking style. But neither stream has presented an optimistic picture. Even though the second stream is more prevalent, these poems have failed to reach the superior class due to lack of compassion. Because these poets refuse to recognize that the enemy before them is human too. There is no fundamental difference between a woman's and a man's world. Nevertheless there is more violence, more

exploitation and more obstacles in the woman's world. Hence it is necessary to look for the roots of this infliction in the economy and politics. For the entire humanity is rendered helpless in these two tenets. Women's writing explicates that this struggle is against injustice and not against humans.³²

If a tree stands in the middle of the path, how long can one go on staring at it, asks Ajantha Dev. With this simple example she proposes the direction for women's poetry of today. She advocates that hatred, anger or tears are obstacles for building a better world and it is high time that women's poetry dissociates itself from such expressions.

Moving beyond phallocentric world of men and appreciating the differences that exist among women has bestowed a lot of strength to the contemporary women's poetry. This aspect has emerged as an identity for women's writing today. Moving away from patriarchies, the desire to derive strength from a mother's living tradition is fiercely evident in women's poetry of the late nineties. B.N.Sumithra Bai, a well-known feminist critic from Kannada observes that Kannada Women's poetry of the nineties sound more introvert, turning towards a state of meditation and is filled with a sense of disillusionment and deep regret.³³

To sum up, women are understood to have special sensibilities and these special sensibilities are looked for in their writings. Male critics dictated terms of women's poetry. Writing to please masculinity or to 'deliver sermons in a male voice' is understood as inappropriate for women's poetry. *Streethva* or

‘womanliness’ in women have gained utmost importance and remain to be the core of discussion. New expressions and concepts evolve abundantly as tools to define and analyse women’s writing.

No distinction is made between the feminine and femininity aspects of womanhood. The biologically acquired and socially attributed associations to womanhood overlap when it is insisted that women poets should write more and more about those experiences that are unique to them. Both in Kannada and Hindi, most of the male scholars/writers have clearly shown their aversion towards feminism. Feminism is seen as a threat to the essential womanhood. They can tolerate a woman who is a poet but not a poet who is a woman and also a feminist. The general concept of feminism is that it is slogan oriented and does not comprise of a universal humanitarian attitude. The notion of being a feminist is seen against the notion of being feminine. There are critics who aptly analyse women’s poetry. They have said that women’s poetry documents the inevitable loneliness and the anxiety and impatience to overcome that loneliness.

Poetry of the seventies questioned the traditional constraints and the already existing norms. In the eighties, re-establishing identities as women became the main agenda. Then poetry by women diverted towards a monologue mode of expression. Its location was centred on debates like femininity, domesticity and sexuality. Positioning of women in the society added to as an important concern in the nineties.

Analysis of women's poetry by women writers and scholars seem to be more rational. They identify with the desire to achieve a worldview, which include feminist dreams and the struggle for it, the exertion, suffocation, anxiety, loss and the joy hidden in women's literature of today. While men tend to perceive women's writing in relation to various aspects of womanhood, women tend to understand women's writing in a larger context - in relation to writing by men, analyses of women's writing by men and also in relation to women and their writing that goes beyond the male gaze. Looking beyond phallocentricism is very essential for women's expression. Moving away from the patriarchies and towards a desire to derive strength from their mother's traditions is fiercely evident in women's poetry of the late nineties.

¹ Saraswathi. Du. "What should I document ?" *Henedare Jedanante*. Bangalore: Ila Prakashana, 1997. Tr. Chitra Panikker.

² Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989, p. 121

³ This association has published series of books under the programme, 'Lekha Loka' in which contemporary women writers are interviewed and questions regarding their writings and the challenges faced by them as individuals are documented.

⁴ Geetha Desai. *Kavana Sourabha*. Bangalore: Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha, 1984.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 1

⁶ *ibid.* p. 6-7

⁷ 'Draupadi' by Maatangi, p. 32. 'Gandhari' by Lalitha Ghorpade, p. 36. and 'Seethe' by L.G.Sumitra, p. 49. in Geetha Desai. 1984

⁸ Pratibha Nandakumar. "Kavithage Kaarana." *Aahaa Purushaakaaram*. Bangalore: Nelamane Prakashana, 2000, p. vi

⁹ Dale Spender. 'Women and Literary History', in Catherine, Belsey, and Jane Moore, eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989, p. 25

¹⁰ Mamta G. Sagar. *Kaadanavilina Hejje*. Heggodu: Akshara Prakashana, 1992, p. i

¹¹ Shanker Mokashi Puneekar. in Hema Pattanashetty. *Virahotsava*. Bangalore: Kannada Sangha, Sheshadripuram College, 1983, pp. 7-8. Emphasis is mine.

¹² Toril Moi, 'Feminist, Female, Feminine', in Belsey, Catherine, and Jane Moore, eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989, pp. 122-123

¹³ V.K. Gokak in Prathibha Nandakumar. *Eetanaka*. Bangalore: Kannada Sangha Christ college, 1988, pp. vi-vii. Emphasis in the quote is mine.

¹⁴ G.S. Shivarudhrappa in Sa. Usha. *Ee Nelada Haadu*. Malladihalli: Samvada Prakashana, 1990, p. v Emphasis is mine.

¹⁵ Ramachandra Sharma in Savitha, Sudha Sharma Chavatti and Bhagavathi, *Attu Bide Gelathi*. Bangalore: Pratibha Yuva Vedike, 1991, p. iv-v. Tr. Chaitra

¹⁶ H.S. Shivaprakash in H.L. Pushpa. *Amruthamati Swagatha*. Bangalore: Anveshane Prakashana, 1992, p. 1. Tr. Chaitra

¹⁷ Terence Hawlas., Introduction. *Making a difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. London: Mathew 1985, p. 22

¹⁸ This was published in the book review column of Lankesh Patrike, 9 December 1992. The notion that there were no women poets after Mahadevi Akka of the 12th century was made so popular that, any kind of poetry by women, be it a love poem or about the contemporary issues, was all read in comparison with the poetry of the 12th century. Time and space interms of social and cultural difference were simply erased.

¹⁹ H.S. Raghavendrarao in U. Maheshwari *Mugila Hakki*. Kasaragodu: Kasaragodu Prakashana, 1996, p. ii

²⁰ H.L. Pushpa. 1992, p. 3

²¹ “*Nannolagina Maathu*”, *ibid.* pp. 4-5

²² Ch. Sarvamangala. “Bhandaru.” Geetha Desai 1984, p. 73

²³ “*Myself and my writing*”, in U. Maheshwari. 1996, p. ix

²⁴ Pratibha Nandakumar. “Kavithage Kaarana.” *Aahaa Purushaakaaram*. Bangalore: Nelamane Prakashana, 2000, p. vi

²⁵ G.S. Amur. “Women’s Poetry, Achievements and problem”, in *Sudha Ugadi Visheshaanka - 1999*. Bangalore: The Printers Mysore Limited, 1999.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Archana Varma. *Lauta Hai Vijayta*. Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1993.

²⁸ Dr. Hardayal. in Sunitha Jain. *Sootradhar Sote Hain*. Delhi: Abhiruchi Prakashan, 1995.
Emphasis is mine.

²⁹ Kedarnath Singh. in Anamika. *Anushtup*. Delhi: Kitab Ghar Prakashan, 1998.

³⁰ Suresh Salil, in Katyayni. *Saat Bhaiyon Ke Beech Champa*. Panchkula: Aadhar Prakashan Private Limited, 1999.

³¹ Ajju Dadda Mishra, in Ajju Dadda Mishra and Ajanta Dev. eds. *Karuna Aaye Magar Is Tarah Nahi*. New Delhi: Indian Sector for Women’ Studies, 1995, p. 5. My translation.

³² Ajanta Dev, in *ibid.* 1995, pp. 7-8. My translation.

³³ B.N. Sumitra Bai, in Saraswathi. Du. 1997, p. viii. Tr. Chaitra.

MAJOR THEMES

‘It seems more important to struggle over what it means to be a woman than whether or not to be one.’¹

In this chapter I have looked into poems by contemporary women poets in Kannada and Hindi. Three major themes recurring in women’s poetry are identified in this chapter. They are domesticity, sexuality and women’s positioning in society. These themes form three sub chapters under which each one is discussed and the argument is supported with poems by contemporary women poets from Kannada and Hindi. Domesticity and the roles women are supposed to play within the range of domesticity in a particular society give rise to the popular notions regarding women’s subjectivity in that society. Some such tools of domesticity are discussed in this subchapter. In the second sub chapter three important controversies from the Kannada scene are discussed to demonstrate the control executed by various cultural guards over female sexuality in a patriarchal society. A range of tools that control female body and sexuality are identified and discussed in this sub chapter. Women’s positioning in society form the third subchapter and it discusses concepts like ‘nationalism’, ‘freedom’ and ‘women’ which got bound in a very special manner. This sub chapter also examines how contemporary poetry by women responds to the atrocities inflicted on women. It also observes how contemporary women’s poetry incorporates various socio-political themes and thereby negates the idea that women have a special sensibility limited only to their womanhood, domesticity and sexuality.

To begin with, if we carefully try to understand what it means to read a poem, one can say that, reading a poem is to know what the poet intends to say. It can also be an attempt to know what is addressed in the poem or to know how an issue already familiar to people is rendered in the poem. The theme is the benevolent factor through which all these attempts are made. Among other elements, theme is an important component of poetry. It allows one to understand poetry from various angles. The theme transcends the scriptural locus of the poem or the poet to a much wider socio-cultural realm, where the poem gains a wider meaning. Theme is that component of the poetry which juxtaposes the poem and the poet with relevant situations and readers.

Themes play a major role in projecting the nuances that define both women and women's poetry. Women's poetry, first of all is a conscious expression by women. It also is a reaction to the male, patriarchal and stereotypical portrayal of women and women's expressions in the mainstream literature and culture.

Women's poetry as an independent voice started surfacing in Kannada and Hindi in the late seventies, when the high Modernist ideology was in vogue. The femininity imposed on women in various forms was seen to be natural to women. This belief, in the Kannada context, lead to the notion that women have a special 'woman sensibility' in their life and in the literatures they produce. Catherine Belsey notices that,

Feminist cultural history emphasizes the ways in which social convention has tended to operate on behalf of the dominant group, and norms of femininity have worked in the interests of men.²

In poetry, like in all other writings, women attempted to re-establish their identity. The agenda was to break away from the traditional constraints and question the already existing norms. They expressed their resistance to certain aspects, which were considered to be social taboos. They wrote their pains with an urge to write. They wrote extensively about oppressions that women were subjected to in the society, in their personal lives and as writers with a much broader perspective. Women dreamt of a better life, a better positioning in the society and a better representation of their self in literature/poetry.

Ideology is not a set of liberated distortions imposed on us from above, but a complex and contradictory system of representations (discourse, images, myths) through which we experience ourselves in relation to each other and to the social structures in which we live.³

In Kannada, the women poets began to re-examine the language, metaphors, imageries and the overall concerns of modernist poetry. In the post eighties, women poets have played a major role in all Indian languages including Kannada and Hindi.

The 'female' objectified and projected abundantly by the modernist male writers and poets were put to query. One such poem, '*Bhoomi geeta*' (Song of the

earth), much acclaimed for its special Modernist perspective is considered to be the pioneer piece of Modern poetry in Kannada written by Gopalakrishna Adiga. As an answer to this poem, Sa.Usha wrote ‘*Yi Nelada Haadu*’ (Song of This Earth), where the portrayal of women by the Modernists is viewed as if it is no better than a rape. The poem itself is a critique of such representations.

My thighs
gashed by a hundred ploughs
I, my mother, her mother, mothers,
above all my aunt
bearing the pain
the wound drying...
...Do you ever feel
I too could bring
colour to your dream,⁴

These poems by women should be understood not just as poetry but also as resistance and as the documentation of expressions from a specific community located in a specific society. “*Tirugane*”, another Kannada poem from *Virahotsava*, a collection of poems by Hema Pattanashetty goes as,

The story of my friends
Communing around me
not just stories. . . .
but are tender agonies of delicate feelings ⁵

Tracing a lineage has been very important for feminist critics and thinkers. Most of the cultures consistently deny history and genealogy for women. This denial, results in condemnation of those women who question the ‘naturalness’ of that which is defined as ‘feminine’ in their culture. They face a range of response varying from dismissal to denunciation.

Realization for a need of reassessment of literary history and re-reading of women’s literature is one of the main agendas of the post eighties women’s poetry. A strong tendency to create history and imagine a tradition can be seen in contemporary women’s poetry. The poem “*KaLedu Hoda Mukhagalu*”⁶ (The Lost Faces) (Kannada) by Sa.Usha expresses this idea.

On the heart’s empty
screen, mixing the *panchapraanas*
in a perfect blend, must be
drawn – her portrait.⁷

Literary histories reinforce boundaries that define poetry and its academic study. Among other literary genres, poetry is bestowed with feminine qualities. Poets compare poetry with woman. One such attempt is a poem, “*Deepika*”, by Lakshminarayana Bhatta in Kannada, in which the poet invites the muse of poetry as a beautiful woman. This particular poem, in the form of a song gained utmost popularity among masses. Such examples are available abundantly in popular culture and classical literature/poetry.

Poetry is also called as '*Kaavya Kannike*' (Poetry personified as a Young Woman), who is beautiful, charming and seductive. She has to be persuaded to listen to the poet (obviously a man). These commonsensical ideas lay the foundation for the definition of poetry. In the process, certain metaphors incessantly used in the language of poetry/literature gain certain meanings and if the poem is popular among people the meaning gets merged in the language of common people.

...the focus on ideas of 'seed and 'earth', which are approached as contrasting constructions of masculinity and femininity and as revealing the respective roles of men and women in society. Cultural idea of femininity have also been thematized from the point of view of the social roles, values and behavioural expectations attached to the different stages of life.⁸

For example, the earth and the sky, flower and the bee, creeper and the tree, fickle and wayward like a river against the strength and steadiness like that of a mountain, etc. The quality of these images inscribes character into [what](#) is signified through them. Obviously what gets signified in this power structure is the 'female' against the 'male', wherein the metaphors signifying the female is positioned as weak against the metaphors signifying the male as strong. This patriarchal perspective gets established easily in the literary and the popular culture. Catherine Belsey rightly says,

to enable us to identify each type, certain familiar cultural codes are invoked and we are invited to make an association between the meaning and the product.⁹

While women write using the same language, with already established meanings, it is obviously difficult for them to express what they want to when the metaphors and the meanings embedded in them are perfectly moulded to suit male expressions. The Hindi feminist poet Archana Verma in her poem '*Man*', writes,

Water on the slope
will run downhill, they said
with an air of finality.
That is, if water is water.

They didn't say: soil on the slope
if it's really soil
will soak up water.....
But the topic wasn't water or grass, or trees.
It was man, about him
no one
said a word.¹⁰

Yet another problem faced by women poets is that, in their case, poetry and woman are not very different. '*Kavya*', the poetry is also a '*Kannike*', the woman herself. Since poetry is a woman, it is delicate, beautiful, and seductive. In other words, all these qualities are implied to the women/writers personally as well.

Poetry is a magical genre. It is a set of images that reflect sounds and visuals, which in turn recreates another body of imagery. These set of images available for us have already gained certain meaning after being used again and again in a specific socio-cultural context. These meanings also go to define qualities attributed to men and women in our society. Therefore, in poetry when we can talk about people, their lives and their feelings through images, the intrinsic meaning of these images get re-constructed along the lines of dominant practices. Images associated with the perception of female and femininity is always constructed against those associated with male and masculinity. If powerful, strong, huge, etc., are considered, as one set of images, beautiful, tender, soft, could be the other. Some clichéd samples are images like sky and earth, expressions like, ‘as strong as the mountain’ and ‘as light as a jasmine’, like man and woman, like good and bad! Here there is a little confusion. Bad in this case can transcend to good only if it functions within the subscribed limits. Then the rules set for the good to remain good and bad to transcend to the status of good are different. Most of the problems start with the binary opposition. Binary opposition is a violent hierarchy and the root cause for all disorders. The images abundantly used in the making of poetry and the meaning in our day-to-day life, gets re-defined on the basis of such binary oppositions. Based on these binary oppositions, every dominant stream constructs image of the ideal woman to suit its necessities. This is done at various historical junctures with various purposes and intensions. Though women in general and women writers in particular have shown resistance in their own ways, the binary oppositions have consciously or unconsciously controlled their lives and writings in all Indian languages.

Writing means so many things for women poets. Hindi poet Indu Jain says, “In the real sense, writing for us is an act to canalise our excitement and to clear the burden loaded on our mind.”¹¹ Vaidehi one of the important Kannada poets says, “Writing strengthens the confidence and will power. It is like holding one’s hand around the oil lamp and struggling to protect the flickering light from the stormy wind.”¹² The Hindi critic Suman Raje says, “Writing for us is like covering the face with one’s hands and letting out silent sobs on a heavy and depressed evening.”¹³ Along with re-establishing their identity, writing poetry itself took the form of protest against the dominant literary trend. They showed their disapproval to the set literary standards. A poem in Kannada by Savitha Nagabhushan titled “*Vimarshe*” (Criticism), is an example for this:

You smell only the
devine flower, *mandara*,
you smear yourself only in *sreegandha*,
the sandal-perfume; I need not
do or confirm the same. ¹⁴

Women writers felt that women’s poetry did not get as much attention as it really deserved and the parameters used to judge their writing was not a suitable one.

My singing pace may not suit
your *taala*, my song may not
merge with the pitch you
set, my voice may remain
unheard against the grandeur

of yours, even then –

mine is not tuneless dissonance.¹⁵

Women defended their writing, which was always seen as something different from the mainstream poetry. Indu Jain the Hindi poet writes,

A little poem if loaded with ideas

can never give the feeling of a branch full of flowers¹⁶

Women poets voiced their dissent to the notion that women did no intellectual writing and their poetry was merely “kitchen literature”. Vaidehi, brings forth in her poem the male attitude towards women. She points out how the male attitude towards the space allotted to women the work of women is in keeping with their notion of femininity and contributes largely towards the construction of a woman’s self and gets transformed into their attitude towards women’s writing.

You, the learned, who know poetry,

tell me, I know nothing of poetry

*Rasam** is all I know... True.

Rasam, in the serve, *rasam* on

The mud-stove that has

been put off, yet not quiet,

for still boiling, it stays there,

without getting spoilt;

I say, Do you know this *Rasam*?

Sorry! I know nothing of poetry...¹⁷

* Rasam is a usual thin spicy South Indian preparation (soup) taken with rice.

According to Eva Figs, ‘gender relations have to do more with custom than with nature. ‘Women’ have been largely man-made.’¹⁸ If, the already established perspective has to be re-read, re-defined or changed, the meanings and their socio-cultural associations of images and the understanding of the situations has to change. Contemporary women’s poetry recreates women’s world with numerous details drawn from day-to-day life situations and activities of women. It is an attempt towards the questioning and re-defining of conventionally accepted norms about both women and poetry. It reinforces certain elements related to poetry and life and attempts to re-establish the lost self-identity for women.

If we go back to the idea put forth in the beginning of this chapter, themes of the poets in their poems also matter in projecting the opinions rooted in their specific backgrounds. Three recurring themes of women’s poetry of the post eighties are identified in this chapter. They are: the idea of domesticity and related concerns, questions related to female sexuality and questions associated with women’s positioning in society. With these themes in the backdrop, poems from Kannada and Hindi are randomly selected to support the arguments that bring forth the questions of patriarchies and resistance. While doing this, it does not mean that a poet’s poem is identified under one specific theme, the concerns of the poet also is limited to that specific argument alone. The issues addressed by poets are definitely interrelated. Compartmentalisation has been done in order to project clearer frames. The poems used in this chapter are by women poets coming from various class, caste, religion and regional backgrounds from Kannada and Hindi languages. Though the main argument moves towards

discussing identified themes and locating diverse ways of resistance offered while these themes are dealt in the contemporary women's poetry, the selected poems themselves portray the diversities present in the poets, thus, supporting the argument that the contemporary women's poetry by itself is not a homogenous category.

¹ T. Modeleski. "Feminism without women." *Literature and Gender*. ed. Lizbeth Goodman. USA: Routledge, 1996, p. 20

² Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989, p. 4

³ Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, eds. "Introduction", in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*. New York: Methuen, 1985, p. XIX

⁴ Sa. Usha. "Ee Nelada Haadu." *Ee Nelada Haadu*. Malladihalli: Samvada Prakashana, 1990. Tr. Tejaswini Niranjana. pp. 5-7

⁵ Hema Pattanashetty. "Tirugane." *Virahotsava*. Bangalore: Kannada Sangha, Sheshadripuram College, 1983. Tr. Chaitra. pp. 13-14

⁶ Translation is mine.

⁷ Sa. Usha. "KaLedu Hoda Mukhagalu." *Kavithogalu 1993*. ed. Kulkarni, Satish. Bangalore: Karnataka Sahitya Academy, 1994. Tr. Chitra Panikker. pp. 92-93.

⁸ R.S.Khare, as quoted in, Niranjana, Seemanthini. *Gender and Space: Femininity, sexualization and the female body*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001, p. 40.

⁹ Catherine Belsey. *Critical Practice*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

¹⁰ Archana Verma. "Man." *In Their Own Voice*. ed. Arlene Zide, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993. Tr. Arun Sitesh and Arlene Zide. p. 242.

¹¹ *ibid*, p.115.

¹² Vaidehi in Nagamani. S. Rao. ed. *Lekha-Loka 2*, a collection of autobiographical narrations by women writers. Bangalore: Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha, 1999, p. 103.

¹³ Virendra Singh. 1987, p.115.

¹⁴ Savitha Nagabhushan. “Vimarshe.” *Chandranannu Kareyiri Bhoomige*. Malladihalli: Samvada Prakashana, 1991. Tr. Chitra Panikker. pp. 30-31.

¹⁵ K.R. Sandhyareddy. “Nanna Haadu.” *Ii Preethiyolage*. Bangalore: Allama Prakashana, 1996. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p.19

¹⁶ Indu Jain. “Bhaar.” *Kona Tera Kaun Sa*. New Delhi: Vaani Prakashan, 1993. My translation. p. 70.

¹⁷ Vaidehi. “Tilidavare Heli.” *Bindu Bindige*. Heggodu: Akshara Prakashana, 1999. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p 16.

¹⁸ Eva Figs as quoted in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, 1989, pp. 3-4

DOMESTICITY

I will not cook today

I will not nurse the crying baby

I will not stitch your torn shirt

Today –

I'll just sit like that

looking out through the window;

When I say this, why are you so angry? ¹

- Pratibha Nandakumar

“Matte Ade Gandasige”

Aahaa Purushaakaaram

Women and domesticity have a long lasting relationship. While introducing the Victorian Woman's world Sztaray Zsuzsa traces how the whole cult of domesticity gets constructed. She says,

A new ideal of womanhood and a new ideology about the home arose out of the new attitudes about work and family. Called the "cult of domesticity," it is found in women's magazines, advice

books, religious journals, newspapers, and fiction – everywhere in popular culture. This new ideal provided a new view of women's duty and role while cataloging the cardinal virtues of true womanhood for a new age.²

The idea of domesticity is generally associated with the state of being tamed and conditioned. Domesticity is related to the idea of home and all that it stands for as against wilderness. Domesticity gives security, shelter and protection. Concepts like family, children etc lead to the above conditionings, where man plays the role of the tamer, protector and the conditioner who provides shelter. Other members of the family and the women are given the role of those tamed, protected and conditioned. The socially constructed notions of motherhood, marriage, duties of a wife or a daughter, and other icons of femininity and womanhood, all work as tools for bringing in domesticity. Seemanthini Niranjana, while discussing the relationship between gender and space rightly says that,

...space is thought of as an intangible, invisible backdrop, in spite of the fact that it is what enable the very definitions of material bodies.³

Agencies like home, family, work place, tradition, and other social constructs actively participate in the formation of domesticity though it varies women's space with the situation in which one lives. Women's space is often associated with the metaphors of home and the kitchen, with jobs like cooking, washing, cleaning and home making, even the jewellery and the dress they wear,

their feelings and expressions. Domestic chores, domesticity and women's participation in it mould the expressions of contemporary women's poetry to a great extent. Anamika, a feminist critic and a poet in Hindi in one of her poems 'Doors'⁴ writes,

I was a door
The harder they beat me
The wider I opened
They walked in and saw
A great cosmic whirligig
When the grinding stops, the spinning begins
When the spinning stops, the sewing begins
Something or the other, all day, non-stop.

And in the end my broom sweeps it all up
Sweeps up the stars in the sky
Mountains, trees, stones
All the shards and splinters of creation
Collects them in a basket
Stores them somewhere
 deep inside
In some corner of the mind.

Women are understood in terms of domesticity and domesticity in terms of womanhood. Much of the notion of domesticity is centred on the very notion of

`woman' itself. While discussing questions of women's writing in her article, 'The Difference of view', Mary Jacobus observes that,

Reaching beyond the sanctuary, transgressing the boundaries of womanhood (Womanhood: the sacred hearth, at once home, womb and tomb; something is being stilled into silence, for the burden of womanhood is also the burden of the mystery) – the movement becomes exit from the sacred into the profane. In this scheme, woman as a silent bearer of ideology (virgin, wife, mother) is the necessary sacrifice to male secularity, worldliness and tampering with the forbidden knowledge. She is the term by which patriarchy creates a reserve of purity and silence in the materiality of its traffic with the world and its noisy discourse.⁵

The ideology of domesticity influences men to observe gender boundaries and play gendered roles, thus supporting the dominance of male power. As Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt have rightly observed,

Ideology is an extremely important site of construction of gender but that it should be understood as part of a social totality rather than an autonomous practice or discourse.⁶

Women in literature were usually represented as the embodiment of tolerance, affection, love and patience. This changed during the Modernist period both in Kannada and Hindi. They began to be portrayed by the male writers mostly as blasphemous, wicked and irreligious. Due to this, the image of the woman as an embodiment of sanctity still rooted in the popular culture gained

much more strength in contrast with woman's portrayal in literature. For women writers, 'women's sensibility' in literature gets defined along the lines of domesticity. Contemporary women's poetry shows resistance to both the sacred and the profane roles assigned to women. Domesticity and its related concerns are efficiently contested in the poems by women written in the post eighties.

The world of outside work was defined as male and the world of the home was defined as female. Women performed their assigned roles efficiently. They played the subordinate female against the dominant male. Within the space given to them, they treasure dreams in their hearts. Muktayakka a contemporary Kannada poet writes,

In your arms, the rainbow colours this night too.

The stars swing merrily . . . Oh!

I never knew life was so beautiful ⁷

Women dreamt of a better life, of freedom and independence, they dreamt of realizing their dreams. Women writers dreamt of realising their dreams in their writing and in their life. In her poem, *A Dream*, Sa. Usha (Kannada) writes,

We are yet to open our wings

and fly to the shade of that

Verdant growth, and build our house

in the tree-trunk and hide

the eggs and warm them, till

they hatch out a new life.⁸

Based on the biological differences between men and women, a behavioural pattern believed only to be related to women has been constructed around the notion of 'woman-hood' which has led to the confusion between the 'feminine' and 'femininity'. Patriarchies have conveniently made use of this confusion to put women, politically, economically and socially in an unequal position, a position inferior to men in society. This social construction of gender is the main cause for the biased familial and social hierarchy. Mary Jacobus points out,

Women remained in the home, as a kind of cultural hostage.

Woman was expected to uphold the values of stability, morality, and democracy by making the home a special place, a refuge from the world where her husband could escape from the highly competitive, unstable, immoral world of business and industry.⁹

Home, house keeping, family and domestic affairs are associated with women, womanhood and the notion of the 'feminine' and in turn understood as non-masculine and so non-intellectual. Hindi poet and feminist Snehamayi Chaudary in one of her poems expresses,

I am interested in the colour applied to the walls of the room,
design of the carpet and to shop for children's' sweaters. For him,
all these non-intellectual affairs definitely don't interest... ¹⁰

Domesticity is the basis of this kind of a perspective towards women. It has been imposed on women in the name of tradition and custom. 'A woman writing thinks back through her mother'; thinking back through her mother

becomes at once recuperation and revision. The rediscovery of a female literary tradition need not mean a return to specifically 'female' domains, ¹¹ says Mary Jacobus. Examples projected as 'ideal' are questioned in women's writing. Women poets write about their experiences. Those experiences embedded in their day-to-day life and highlighted their condition within the domestic realm. Their poems are full of metaphors associated with the domesticity they are subjected to. They question the condition in which they are trapped. Vaidehi, a major voice in Kannada poetry writes in her poem about how generations of women are subjected to the monotonous churning of domesticity. She says,

They,
A warm bed at night, slave all day
Stirring aromas in tune with the chants
A mere seasoning on the delicacies cooked.
Becoming well worn sarees and adorable jewellery
Lost in the labour room
Vanishing as drained tears from empty eyes
The untaught torch-bearers
of growing brightness . . . ¹²

Motherhood is the most important constituent of domesticity. It is given a very special place and attached to umpteen values and morals. Motherhood is a metaphor incessantly dealt with in poetry. An ideal motherhood is portrayed and understood as an embodiment of womanhood. Motherhood is always seen as a highly esteemed position in the family. Usha. P. Rai (Kannada) says that,

There's bliss in motherhood

Even in the earth shattering pain

There are heart warming joy¹³

Women poets reconstruct their pasts through their mothers. Motherhood emerges as a reoccurring theme in women's writing in Kannada as well as in Hindi. Like S.Malathi (Kannada), many women poets tend to relate their experiences with their 'mothers'.

In your shadow mother, I stand firm on the soil¹⁴

In the process the established notion of motherhood is contested and a link is made with the past through scrutiny and resistance. Women's expressions and women's writing are reread and brought to light. Histories are reconstructed and Histories associated to women's representations are being rewritten. More seems to be hidden and more needs to be excavated. As Vaidehi says,

My mother's *saree*, long..long..long

the more you wear, still more is left,¹⁵

This leads us to understand that there is a great breach between what is said and what actually is. Let us see some of the examples from both Kannada and Hindi. Bhanu Mushtaq, a practicing lawyer, a poet and a short story writer in Kannada voices the rights of Muslim women. Bhanu in her poem 'Mother's Saree', captures how the childhood of a Muslim girl gradually gets transformed into the motherhood stealing her desire and aspirations. The poet writes,

Mother,

still a tender bud,

she had just returned from her hop-scotch
on her forehead drops of sweat
the bruise on the knee still fresh
Wrapped in a red *saree* as bright as the ripe bitter gourd seed
when Uncle lifted her and handed over to my dad
like a rose for his Nehru collar,
.....the vertical and horizontal lines all over,
dots inside the squares - lie scattered here and there
those dreams that failed to bloom....¹⁶

If the mother in Bhanu Mushtaq's poem lacks opportunity to realise her dreams, one of the senior poets of the contemporary Hindi literature, Jotsna Milan in her poem 'Night' portrays the mother caught up in the domestic chores. She writes,

For mother, the day begins very early, earlier than anybody else's
and ends after everyone's is over. As per rule nights are shorter
and the days longer and this is true in mother's case as well.
Curling her legs, she tries to sleep, in what is left of her night. Her
nights are never so long to even stretch her tired legs.¹⁷

Du. Saraswathi a dalit-activist and a Kannada poet in her poem 'Mother' writes,

Burning
her blood
to light our lamps
Brightness!! Brightness!!
.... Shrivelling into a corpse
bit by bit

her worn out bones
burning swiftly
washed away in the heat of burning embers
she drifted away in the *Kaveri*.
with her drifted
her prosperous nest
leaving behind the vestige¹⁸

Both Jotsna Milan and Saraswathi paint the picture of a mother who is old, tired and has spent all her life for the other members of the family. They also recognise that the mother's concerns remain unrecognised. The understanding of 'the mother' figure as an embodiment of sacrifice is questioned here. Women poets also take note of the stereotypes of motherhood that are embedded in domesticity and are portrayed in cultural productions like literature, other mediums of art and popular culture. Archana Varma, one of the important voices from Hindi, in her poem, 'Mother in Poetry Now-a-days', says,

These days, in poetry –
the mother hums while she works on
the grinding-stone, wipes the forehead
with her pallu and sings a lullaby;
She's the beloved mother, the embodiment
Of love, seen active and alert
always – after seeing all this,
my son may not recognize me;

– I am scared. ¹⁹

Contemporary women's poetry realises that motherhood is not a serene experience always and housework is not necessarily fulfilling. The difference between the real and the sugar-coated images are brought to light by women's poetry.

Marriage is another recurring theme in contemporary women's poetry. It questions the institution of marriage and exposes the drawbacks of it. Prathiba Nandakumar, one of the major voices among contemporary women writers in Kannada writes,

this show-off of marriage
why will it not end? like
the cutting-saw, each day
it saws me into a bluntness,
why doesn't it break once for all? ²⁰

Mamta Kalia the Hindi poet in her poem '*Marital Bliss*' writes how a bitter marriage leaves women helpless and need for married girls to hide their sorrows and problems from their parents. She writes,

I wanted to tell them
How once I cried the whole night
Pushing away thoughts of suicide.
.....Mom and Daddy's wrinkled faces,
Eyelids and hands
Trembling.
I swallowed everything
And smiled like a contented woman. ²¹

Women are taught to grow up with pleasant dreams about married life. They are trained and moulded to imagine and fantasize about married life. Kannada poets, Sukanya Maruthi and Usha P Rai efficiently capture the reality and the disillusionment associated with such fantasies in their poems,

Disguised behind the fake words

Of love and passion

Are the stains of raw lust. . ²²

Here,

my unfulfilled

aspirations and dreams

are for sale... ²³

The social censorships women have to go through remain unsaid as if it is natural. Poems featured in the Kannada anthology, '*Kavadeyata*' are very personal. They speak of the domestic violence, harassment and oppression that women are subjected to in their day-to-day life. In her poem 'Woman and Blood', Pratibha writes,

Tiny fingers cut and bleed

the kitchen knife!

pain behind the bandage continues.....

in the play ground, on the cycle seat, ...

in the cinema balconies,

... the first love letter, on the prepared bed for the first night.

Later –

the flow stopping is also a problem.

families and empires have fallen for this
....Then bursts out that which waits inside
Oh god there flows the blood red
...One day the blood stops flowing.
bow to the '*rishyapanchami* pedestal'
get ready to cross the '*vaitharani*'
'blood relation means....' they try to explain,
I stopped them to say, "I know, I am a woman". ²⁴

Physical assault inflicted on women is often referred to in Pratibha's poems. She speaks about domestic violence and its repercussions most of the times accepted as quite natural. She says,

...then how do you know about the blue marks and the
blood clots on the soft body wrapped inside this six yard
saree?²⁵

...the eye, the ocean from where not even one drop of tear
spills out²⁶

Domestic violence creates a suffocating atmosphere for women who go through it. Anamika one of the contemporary Hindi poets writes about a distant hope that still lingers in the middle of the bitterness and fear left as an aftermath of domestic violence,

She always prayed, let the love - read in bits and pieces,
seen in films, heard in songs happen. Let all those
accumulate in him, who batters for everything. ²⁷

Savitha Nagabhushan, a Kannada poet in her poem 'I Protest', condemns the
violence inflicted on women by men,

It's your anger and rage,
I object to.
Be it Volcano or the Sun –
Never have they destroyed anyone
Through anger and rage –
There is no such document! ²⁸

They protest against domestic violence. A woman who lives through a
monotonous routine and is the target of domestic violence would not find any
difference between life and death. Indu Jain (Hindi) in her poem 'A Question',
asks,

Is there life after death
the question sounds a bit rude
One more question I asked the mirror
Is there life before death.... ²⁹

‘I know what it means, the experience of getting choked’³⁰

...says Archana Varma (Hindi). Domestic violence on women is talked about and condemned vociferously in contemporary women’s poetry in Kannada and Hindi. The Kannada poem ‘*Vulture and the Pigeon*’ by Du. Saraswathi (Kannada) clearly demonstrates this,

The vulture sitting outside rolled its cruel eyes.

The pigeon inside said in her low voice,

to love is the way to live.

My sharp eyes, my strong wings stretch beyond the sky!

are you jealous? or do you think you can stand my attack?

asked the brutal bird.

The vulture attacked.

White soft body turned red in blood.

The malicious bird walked in pride.

The seed of vengeance silently sprout in the dead eyes.³¹

These poems unmask the cruelty hidden behind the ‘naturalness’ of gender roles. The role of family, husbands and children, complexity of relationships involved while playing the mother, wife or just a woman is talked about. Indu Jain (Hindi) comments,

Life is all over getting scolding and humiliations.³²

Domestic violence can be subtle or obvious in nature. Wherever there is a difference of opinion, conflicts arise. Snehamayi Chaudhari (Hindi) says,

It is not necessary

That war be waged
only on borders
Wherever there is war
There are borders.....³³

Language is yet another area that contributes to the construction of domesticity. The language signifies meanings and attitudes rooted in specific cultures. In the Kannada poem, “She, He and the Language”, Vaidehi talks about confinement and the hope of freedom. The poem goes as,

The other day he had talked about windows,
not doors as she had understood
He had said something about the wall,
she thought it as the open field.
does it mean that if the walls are broken it is all open fields? ³⁴

Indu Jain (Hindi) demonstrates in her poem the rift experienced by women/writers in a patriarchal society, where language itself may re-inscribe the structures with which they are oppressed.

Brighter the sun, stronger is the shadow
in my language sun is a masculine gender
and shadow the feminine.

She stands there firmly rooted
Creating illusions in him,

Of him becoming a huge tree
He, the weak male, a creeper. ³⁵

‘Displaced’³⁶, a poem by Anamika (Hindi), talks of how marginalisation of women is embedded in language, education and culture.

We realised our place when the first lesson was taught in the school.

‘Ram go to school, Radha you go and cook.
This is a house. Ram look, this is your room.’
‘and mine?’
‘are you mad?’
girls are breeze, warmth and the soil
there won’t be any room for them!’.

The demands of domesticity are such that women’s spaces are neither understood in terms of individual spaces nor are women understood as individuals independent from other people. They are always understood in terms of other specific domesticities associated with them. Madhavi Bhandari (Kannada) dreams of a day which would be free from all domestic chores.

This New Year,
somewhere or the other, within
the small bit of remnant happiness,
I may find a day, specifically
mine, that one day which
is not there in the calendar. ³⁷

Dream is another reoccurring theme in women's poetry. Dreams about family, marriage, home and children on the one hand and dreams about breaking the barriers of domesticity reoccur in the contemporary women's poetry. In a Kannada poem by Du. Saraswathi, "Dreams", the poet portrays the disillusionment when dreams about family, home, husband and children gradually get shattered. Dreams that were cherished for so long simply vanish, unveiling the harsh realities of life in no time. The poem begins with a question,

Have you ever dreamt?
of husband, home and children?
"Yes I had
when I was 18
Now I realize
Husband, home and children...
cannot be a dream
but reality
Dream
is insubstantial
formless like air, like fragrance. ³⁸

Dreams, whispers, colours
tied in a white cloth,
safely hidden,
hidden in the womb
has been stolen.....
I do not know why

I do not know how.....³⁹

But women are optimistic. Life does not end. The bitterness does not stop them from dreaming. Life carries on with hope. In her poem, “Dreams Don’t Die”, Hema (Kannada) announces,

Dreams don’t die

Waiting, rotting, come what may

Dreams are powered to spring back⁴⁰

Thus, contemporary women’s poetry invokes hope for freedom and a better life within the patriarchal society. Amidst all these hurdles, women’s poetry leaps beyond the assigned roles played by women in situations forced on them. Contemporary women’s poetry criticises domesticity in which the women are trapped.

Now let us look into some of the poems from Kannada and Hindi where the resistance to the patriarchal systems that trap women in various modes of domesticity are clearly expressed. Muktayakka a Kannada poet writes,

Dear husband, I,

though as patient as the Earth

as caring as the Mother

as enticing to sleep with as Rambha

as a lot many more

would still not wish to dissolve in you.⁴¹

‘Cat’⁴² is another poem in Kannada by Pratibha, where the narrator wants to make things easier for the cat that steals the milk. So she keeps a bowl full of milk for the cat and waits for him to come and drink. He never comes. She feels he would be tired hunting for food. To make things easier she waits with the fish in a plate. He never comes. Maybe he will arrive late at night so she keeps the window open to make things easier for the cat. He never comes. Soon that cat is found eating cockroaches from somebody’s backyard drain. The smell doesn’t go away even after a proper bath is given to it. So she mixes rat poison in the cat’s milk and makes him drink that.

While portraying various dimensions of domesticity women’s poetry also makes an effort to move beyond the domestic claustrophobia. In one of the Kannada poems by Pratibha, it is clearly expressed that neither domesticity nor domestic violence can hold back a person if she is not willing to succumb to its forces,

if you don’t let me out at least give me the divine eye

let me look through it and be satisfied.

If this is not possible, then; no barrier can stop me⁴³

Relationships between men and women are subjected to constant questioning filled with anxious doubts. This leads to an atmosphere that gives a feeling of insecurity within the family where the “home” gets transformed into an alien space. A poem in Hindi by Archana Verma, goes like this,

He said,
‘why that corner
when the whole house is yours’
She spread herself in that house
where not one corner was familiar to her.... where
she melted like the butter on the hot *rotis*
went through the grind in between the teeth
stayed in the corner of the plate like spicy *chutny*.
Like crisp iron on the washed cloths
she stayed uncrumpled till evening
then again the next day all from the start, started the day...

she slept in the broad day light and woke up in her dream
to see her reflection fading out...
since then, she fears to sleep
Now she has a house and a fear,
where dreams have no place at all. ⁴⁴

Pain, helplessness and anger against the state of being tamed and conditioned are efficiently portrayed in contemporary women’s poetry. Contemporary women’s poetry makes an attempt to leap beyond the barriers within which women’s experiences are trapped.

I have tried to draw attention to the point that the domesticity portrayed in the poems by contemporary women poets in Kannada and in Hindi is not

homogenous. It is multi dimensional, multi faceted and as varied as the backgrounds of the poets. Their dreams and aspirations vary along these backgrounds. The domesticity portrayed here is rooted in various classes, castes and cultural spaces represented by the contemporary women poets. It reflects their varied experiences arising from such diverse backgrounds.

¹ Pratibha Nandakumar. "Matte Ade Gandasige." *Aahaa Purushaakaaram*. Bangalore: Nelamane Prakashana, 2000. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 30.

² Sztaray Zsuzsa. "Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood." *Introduction to a Victorian Woman's World*. < <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/386/truewoman.html> >

³ Seemanthini, Niranjana. *Gender and Space: Femininity, sexualization and the female body*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001, p.34

⁴ Anamika. "Doors." *The Guarded Tongue* Women's writing and censorship in India. New Delhi: Women's World and Asmita, 2001, p. 114.

⁵ Mary Jacobus. "The Difference of view." Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore., eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989 p. 50

⁶ Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt., eds. *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*. New York: Methuen, 1985..

⁷ H.S. Muktayakka. "Raatriyallu Kaamanabillu." *Pranayini*. Shashikala Veeraiahswamy and Suknya Maruthi. Bangalore: Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha, 1996. Tr. Chaitra. p. 94.

⁸ Sa. Usha. "A Dream." *Ee Nelada Haadu*. Malladihalli: Samvada Prakashana, 1990. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 25.

⁹ Mary Jacobus. 1989, pp. 49-62

¹⁰ Snehamayi Chaudary. "Taste Difference." *Karuna Aaye Magar Is Tarah Nahi*. Mishra, Aju Dadda. New Delhi: Indian Sector for Women' Studies, 1995, p. 70. My translation.

¹¹ Mary Jacobus. 1989, p. 61

¹² Vaidehi. "Listen daughter, they are our ancestors." *Parijatha..* Bangalore: Kannada Sangha Christ college, 1999. Tr. Chaitra. p. 43.

¹³ Usha. P. Rai. "Motherhood." *Kanasugalu Nanasugalu*. Bangalore: Satvika Prakashana, 1993. Tr. Chaitra. p. 34.

¹⁴ S. Malathi. "Ammanige." *Helabekenisiddu*. Bangalore: Ila Prakashana, 2001. My translation. p. 83.

¹⁵ "My Mother's Saree." Vaidehi. 1999. My translation. p. 49.

¹⁶ Bhanu Mushtaq. "Mother's Saree." *Uri Badalagideye*. Sandhyareddy, K.R. Bangalore: Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha, 2002. p. 26. My translation. p. 26.

¹⁷ Jothsna Milan. "Raath." *Karuna Aaye Magar Is Tarah Nahi*. Mishra, Ajju Dadda. New Delhi: Indian Sector for Women' Studies, 1995. My translation. p. 22.

¹⁸ Saraswathi Du. "Avva." *Henedare Jedanante*. Bangalore: Ila Prakashana, 1997. Tr. Chaitra. p. 16.

¹⁹ Archana Varma. "Mother In Poetry Now-a-days." *Lauta Hai Vijayta*. Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1993. Tr. Chitra Panikker and Mamta G Sagar. p. 92.

²⁰ "Daampatya." Pratibha Nandakumar. 2000. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 26.

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- ²¹ Mamta Kalia. "Marital Bliss." *In their own voices* The Penguin Anthology of Contemporary Indian Women Poets. Arlene R K Zide. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993. Tr. Arun Sitiesh and Arlene Zide. p. 94
- ²² Sukanya Maruti. "Kelu Taayi." *Kavithegalu* 1993. Satish Kulkarni. Bangalore: Karnataka Sahiya Academy, 1994. Tr. Chaitra. p. 86.
- ²³ "Kanasugalu." Usha.P. Rai. 1993. My translation. p. 1.
- ²⁴ Prathibha Nandakumar. "Woman and blood." *Kavadeyaata*. Bangalore: Kannada Sangha Christ college, 1998. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 103.
- ²⁵ "Two Poems." *ibid*. My translation. p. 6.
- ²⁶ "Two Poems." *ibid*. My translation. p. 6.
- ²⁷ "Hitopadesh." Anamika. 1998. Tr. by the poet. p. 34.
- ²⁸ Savitha Nagabhushan. "Dhikkarisuttene." *Chandranannu Kareyiri Bhoomige*. Malladihalli: Samvada Prakashana, 1991. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 26.
- ²⁹ Indu Jain. "Savaal." *Kona Tera Kaun Sa*. New Delhi: Vaani Prakashan, 1993. My translation. p. 16.
- ³⁰ "Jao Sans Ki Tarah." Archana Varma. 1993. My translation. p. 9.
- ³¹ "The Vulture and The Piegion." Saraswathi Du. 1997. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 31.
- ³² "Asang." Indu Jain. 1993. My translation. p. 52.
- ³³ Snehamayi Chaudhari. *Ai Aisa Samay Hai*. New Delhi: Sahmat Tr. Anjali Deshpande.

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- ³⁴ “She, He and the Language.” Vaidehi. 1999. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 7.
- ³⁵ “Asoorya.” Indu Jain. 1993. Tr. Chitra Panikker and Mamta G Sagar. p. 39.
- ³⁶ Anamika. “Displaced.” *Anushtup*. Delhi: Kitab Ghar Prakashan, 1998. Tr. by the poet. p.
- ³⁷ Madhavi Bhandari. “Nannade Aada Ondu Dina.” *Kattuvadu Balu Kashta*. Udupi: Published by the poet, 1997. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 39.
- ³⁸ “Dreams.” Saraswathi Du. 1997. Tr. Chitra Panikker and Mamta G Sagar. p.
- ³⁹ *ibid*. Tr. Chitra Panikker and Mamta G Sagar.
- ⁴⁰ Hema Pattanashetty. “Kanasu Saayuvudilla.” *Kannugallalli Kanasu Tumbi*. Darwad: Ananya Prakashana, 1993. Tr. Chaitra. p. 23.
- ⁴¹ Muktayakka. “Naanu Naane Aagi Bandaaga.” in Shashikala Veeraiahswamy and Suknya Maruthi. 1996. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 92.
- ⁴² “Bekku.” Pratibha Nandakumar. 1998. My translation. p. 88.
- ⁴³ “Dayavittu.” Pratibha Nandakumar. 1998. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 100.
- ⁴⁴ “Fear.” Archana Varma. 1993. Tr. Chitra Panikker and Mamta G Sagar. p. 35.

SEXUALITY

....this (body) is full of life;
incorporates love, desire and charm
I get angry to see myself acting cool
while the hunger inside burns ¹

- H.L.Pushpa

“Amruthamathi’s Monologue”

Amruthamathi Swagatha

The word sexuality brings in a range of associations related to the human body. Sexuality is rooted in our bodies which are in turn expressed through sexuality. The male, the female, and the norms attached to these gendered identities contribute to the defining of specific sexualities. Sexuality of women is always controlled and kept under watch in a patriarchal society. Customs and traditions imbibed as an inseparable part of domesticity to some extent function as measures to check and suppress the expressions of female sexuality. Women’s questioning of the domesticity in a patriarchal society also leads to the

questioning of norms that support such domesticity. Women's hope for freedom and a better life leads to the questioning of established norms like customs and traditions.

Customs and traditions are imposed on the lives of women through various cultural codes. What a woman is supposed to wear, how she has to dress up, the way she is supposed to carry herself in her dress and the makeup she uses, are all well planned for women. Along with dress codes, behaviours and mannerisms are also defined for women. The dos and don'ts are prescribed for them and perfect women are designed to fit within the frames of patriarchies. Each and every movement is restricted, modified and defined for women. These restrictions aim to control women's body and sexuality. Hence, feminist literature has always raised issues relating to women's body and sexuality. They have deconstructed the ways in which societies regulate woman's sexuality. In her article, 'Writing the Body: Towards an Understanding of L'écriture Feminine', Rosalind Ann Jones points out that

Theoretical work and practical evidence strongly suggest that sexual identity ('I am a woman, I experience my body as sexual in this way') never takes shape in isolation or in a simply physical context.²

A range of cultural tools embedded in a society efficiently controls female body and sexuality. Censorship of literary works for various reasons is one such tool. Jeffrey Weeks in his book *Sexuality* says,

The patterns of female sexuality are inescapably a product of the historically rooted power of men to define and categorize what is necessary and desirable.³

Now let us look into some of the examples from Kannada literature that demonstrate how any discussion of female sexuality in the public space calls for criticism and condemnation from various patriarchal groups. One such issue had been raised in the Kannada literary world in the fifties and can be remembered here. This occurred when A.N.Krishna Rao's⁴ (Aa.Naa.Kru) novels '*Nagna Sathya*' (The Naked Truth) and '*Shani Santaana*'⁵ (Shani's Children) were published. '*Nagna Sathya*' is a story condemning that society which forces women into practicing social evils like prostitution. It sympathizes with such women and also proposes social reformation for prostitutes. The author was condemned for writing on themes like prostitution. After '*Shani Santaana*' was published, the author and his writings were bitterly criticized by literary dignitaries and the press. The entire progressive movement that the author associated himself was termed as the '*The Porno Literary Movement*', by critics.⁶ Articles against Aa.Naa.Kru's writings were published in all major newspapers and journals. A group of writers at the 'Conference of Short Story Writers and Novelists', held on 3 February 1951 decided that,

Kannada short story writers, novelists and all others writing in various genres should not ruin the forthcoming generations of our land and nation by writing literatures that would provoke sexuality.⁷

Reacting to this issue the author wrote another book on Literature and provocations of sexuality titled, “*Saahithya mattu Kaamaprachodane*”⁸ which contained articles on the relationship of sexuality and literature in the Kannada context and in the context of world literature. This book includes lengthy discussions about how talking about sexuality is important and how it is different from “vulgarity” (*Ashleela*) in a literary context. In his book on ‘Literature and Provocations of Sexuality’, the author asked the readers whether it was vulgar if a writer wrote about the darker side of a prostitute’s life instead of exaggerating it as something highly romantic.⁹ While, writing on issues concerned with female sexuality is forbidden for male writers, the idea of women expressing their sexuality in their writing always remains proscribed.

Whenever reference to female sexuality appears in the public sphere individuals, conservatives, fundamentalists, State and other patriarchal agencies show a tendency of becoming cultural guards and make much louder noise to suppress the voices raised. Usually issues associated with female sexuality are viewed from a traditional or a religious fundamentalist perspective. In 1984 Religious fundamentalists attacked Sara Abubekar for writing a novel, ‘*Chandragiriya Teeradalli*’. They claimed that she had not understood Koran. The novel talks about polygamy and the *talaq* system practiced in Muslim community. It ‘throws light on the heinous system of *talaq* and reconciliation.’¹⁰

Most of the times discussions of female sexuality in any form are countered by literatures printed and published by patriarchal agencies in the society. These literatures function as censors and control or suppress the debates

on sexuality in public spheres. For example, ‘Fire’ and ‘Water’, films by Deepa Mehta called for strong opposition from various social groups. In the year 2000, ‘*Samskaara Bharati*’ a division of the Hindu fundamentalist organization, *Rashtreeya Swayamsevaka Sangha* (RSS) published a five-page handout in Kannada defining the notion of “freedom of expression”.¹¹ In this article there is an elaborate discussion about the importance of the Indian tradition and its *Hindu Dharma*. The desirable and the undesirable representations of women and their sexuality within this framework are specified. Along with the director of the film, actresses Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das have also been condemned for acting in Deepa Mehta’s films which are projected as threats to the Indian society.

We saw three examples from 1951, 1984 and 2000. Three different groups have raised issues that have cropped up at three different periods of time. In the case of ‘*Nagna Sathya*’ and ‘*Shani Santaana*’, it was the literary community that raised its voice against the representation of female sexuality. In the case of ‘*Chandragiriya Teeradalli*’, it was the Muslim religious fundamentalist groups that condemned the author and in the case of ‘*Fire*’ and ‘*Water*’, it was the Hindu religious fundamentalist and political organisations that published literature against expression of female sexuality and the need for censorship in the field. These demonstrate that sexuality has always been a taboo in our society. A great deal of pressure is exerted on both writers and readers, especially where female sexuality is concerned. Luce Irigaray and Helen Cixous emphasized that,

Women, historically limited to being sexual objects for men (virgins or prostitutes, wives or mothers), have been prevented from expressing their sexuality in itself or for themselves. If they

can do this, and if they can speak about it in the new language it calls for, they will establish a point of view (a site of *difference*) from which phallogocentric concepts and controls can be seen through and taken apart, not only in theory, but also in practice.¹²

Myths and mythologies embedded in specific cultures also act as efficient cultural tools that confine female sexuality. In the contemporary poetry by women, assertion of female sexuality is accomplished by the retelling of Myths. Myths always create ideas that cannot be broken. Myths are projected as histories and rules defining femininity are set for women. Examples of good and bad women are inscribed as role models. Sita, Savithri, Draupadi, Gandhari, Ahalye and many more characters are talked of as if such convenient patriarchal portrayals are the ultimate reality for women. Valorising ‘chastity’ takes a prime place in the role-playing of ‘good women’.

Women’s rereading of myths can be understood as a form of resistance. The terms ‘submission’, ‘obedience’ and ‘loyalty’ are seen through different perspectives in women’s poetry. Thus women’s poetry becomes an exercise of de-mythifying the myths.

‘*Amruthamati’s Monologue*’ a poem in Kannada by H.L.Pushpa negates the already constructed notion of the ‘feminine’ depicted very often in mythological characters, e.g., Amruthamathi, Draupadi, Madhavi, Mahadevi Akka, etc. The female body becomes an important metaphor in this reading.

Amruthamathi is a character in Janna's *Yashodhara Charitha*, a tenth century Kannada classic. She is a beautiful queen of a handsome king but falls in love with the ugly mahout, Ashtavanka. The king portrayed in *Yashodhara Charitha* is full of good qualities. Amruthamathi is happy living with him. No reason is given for her transformation apart from the fact that she is attracted by the music played by the mahout. In 'Amruthamati Swagata', i.e., Amruthamati's monologue, Amruthamati is represented as dissatisfied with her husband. Amruthamathi's character valorises chastity in Janna's *Yashodhara Charitha*, which the re-worked version of this poem expresses as suppressed sexual desire:

....this (body) is full of life;
incorporates love, desire and charm....
I get angry to see myself acting cool
while the hunger inside burns.....

We are reborn as Amruthamathis,
the queens for the thrones of the kings like you
and he as a mahout an answer for us.¹³

Before my murder I should turn into a stone;
Before they choke the throat of this wandering mind
I should turn into a stone...¹⁴

Kannada women poets in the early eighties though highly influenced by the *Navya* poets like Adiga and Ramachandra Sharma negate the notion of objectification of female sexuality. The social stigma attached to the mythological

characters like Sita, Ahalye, Amruthamathi or Madhavi are questioned. Pushpa (Kannada) in her poem '*Madhavi*' writes,

He who enjoyed your youth,
never would bring the anklet for you...
Thousands lost and thousands gained,
you never got the anklet....
...every woman carries your song in her womb.¹⁵

It also seems like inverting the secured safe notion of the middle class family. Female sexuality is seen as strong and powerful.

Before *maya*; disappears Allama.
vanishes '*nirmaaya*'.
no sign of you without me
inside the moving mendicant temple....
bearded 'Sadhu's, the clean shaven preachers
all surrender to the '*kama*' and the '*moha*'
.....on the paths of '*nirmaya*' born
again as a woman the virtuous Akka...¹⁶

Conventional codes are set for women through these embellished mythological characters. While women re-tell these myths, the larger-than-life characters are identified with day-to-day situations.

In '*Sita's Desire*'¹⁷ by Madhavi Bhandari (Kannada) the phallocentricity of the Ramayana is highlighted. 'As a son, as a brother, you who proved to be the

perfect of all; did you ever at least once in your dreams; think about me, about my heart that has burnt to ashes from within,' questions Sita. 'How wonderful is your Ramayana', she ridicules. Thus traditional models and ideas are dismantled and a new perspective occupies its place.

Retelling of the myths is a point of rupture that allows women to openly talk about female body and sexuality in their poems. They establish the fact that a woman's body and her sexuality is a site of pain and oppression. Lalitha Naik (Kannada) in her poem questions,

For you
Who have decided
That my soft contours
Are only meant to
Please and satiate your senses,
I search for a word
More potent than
'rejection'.¹⁸

Women's desires are physically and socially trapped in the body. As Jeffrey Weeks notes, a number of feminist writers have seen the elaboration of sexual difference as crucial to the oppression of women, with sexuality not merely reflecting but being fundamental to the construction and maintenance of the power relations between women and men.¹⁹

The woman, is petrified of her appearance,
Like the fragrance, imprisoned,

She lies in the flower of her body;
In her body-flower, hidden
Like fragrance lies each of these
– *devi, daasi, preyasi* – each,
a self-destructing weapon.
woman, is petrified of her appearance..²⁰

Sexuality is shaped by social forces. And far from being the most natural element in the social life, the most resistant to cultural moulding, it is perhaps one of the most susceptible to organisation..... sexuality only exists through its social forms and social organisations.²¹

Female sexuality is bounded by social norms. Though the body shelters desires, the right to express these desires is controlled and commanded by social norms. The relation between woman's body and the desires hidden in the body is expressed efficiently by contemporary poets in Kannada and Hindi.

Desires wanting to burst out,
Caution: let this never happen.
dreams twinkling in dark nights...
like jasmine-buds entangled in
the hair: these strings of love
stretch through our entire life..²²

(Sandhya Reddy, Kannada)

On the platform of her body,

she waits for him – within her,
it's as dark as it's outside.²³

(Gagan Gill, Hindi)

Friendship contained love
love had desire in it
desire contained (in) the body
when the body itself cannot be saved
where is the place for desire ²⁴

(Gagan Gill, Hindi)

Recognition of the body and its importance lead to search for their lost identity and self-respect. Women's identities get re-established in women's poetry through questioning and denial of the set-standards.

Elements of nature are exaggerated and beautified in poetry. The beautification of nature is done by invoking the female body. Female sexuality comes to the forefront. Nature is perceived in the form of a woman. Woman is appropriated with nature and a certain persona is sketched out for women. The femininity imposed in this manner is seen as natural to women. While questioning such depictions women writers challenge these imposed notions forced on them. In the process, representation of their 'self' gets reconstructed in their writings. 'Woman's self' seen earlier as an embodiment of patience, sacrifice, submission and tolerance, gets transformed into an assertive self with a much clearer notion of self-identity.

Women's poetry attempts to establish the 'woman's self' independent from its stereotypical portrayal. When the significance of the body is realized importance of the 'self' within that body is also realized and the lost self is recovered from the role-play it is forced into. Usha P Rai (Kannada) writes,

The "me" within has died I think
Behind these masks I wear;
When someone else is enacting
The *sutradhari* of my play, my
'self' I should forget, and smile.²⁵

Maheshwari.U (Kannada) notes that the barrier between the 'self' and the role-play is so vast that sometimes it is difficult even to hear the voice from within that resists the assigned roles. She writes,

Oh, I had completely forgotten about the 'I' inside me.²⁶

In the context of female sexuality, the 'mother' becomes the representative of the patriarchal values. She is seen as the upholder of the conservative and oppressive traditional values. It is through motherhood that patriarchies impose femininity on women on the one hand and suppresses female sexuality on the other. Let us now look into some such poems from Hindi and Kannada. Champa Vaid (Hindi) in her poem "*My Mother's Sermon*", writes,

Don't bathe in the nude
You are a girl remember
Don't play with boys
You will conceive
if you look into their eyes...

The list of my mother's do's and don'ts was long...²⁷

Sa. Usha, (Kannada) writes a poem "*To Mother*", where she complains,

Mother, don't, please don't,
.....Don't say: you're seventeen already,
don't flash your sari in the street,
don't make eyes at passers-by,
don't be a tomboy riding the winds
Don't play that tune again
what your mother
her mother and her mother
had played on the snake charmer's flute..²⁸

Mother is also seen as someone who in the name of tradition blindly offers her daughter into the hands of cruelty. Sunitha Jain (Hindi) in her poem "*Mother*" repents,

I have been tied to an elephant foot
for twenty-five years
because you said your wish mattered
more than my life; and the moth-eaten tradition
of a heartless family cried, sacrifice.
I have tried not to curse you..²⁹

The exuberant image of the imagined mother etched till then is distorted by contemporary women's poetry only to bring out life's realities. Doing this contemporary women's poetry problematises the glorious and the homogenous

portrayal of motherhood always equated with womanhood. Kamla Bhasin in an interview, answering a question as to whether feminists are against motherhood, makes it clear that,

...we do not consider motherhood to be every woman's destiny, nor do we equate womanhood with motherhood.³⁰

Women poets realize the importance of self-identity through the denial of both the roles assigned and the femininity forced on them. They articulate the resistance very clearly. The Kannada poet Savitha Nagabhushan in her poem *Beejayajna* states the disagreement with the roles assigned to women in a patriarchal society. She specifies,

I'm not the mother
I'm not the wife
I'm not the daughter –
I'm neither Love
Nor Patience
Nor Peace.³¹

Like men, women also are embodiment of good and bad qualities. Their aversions and desires are all concealed behind myth, femininity, customs and tradition. A personality alien to their actual identity is put forth. Women's poetry resists the super-human qualities attached to women's identities. M.R.Kamala (Kannada) writes,

I'm the embodiment of all
my pettiness, selfishness,
- a sum total of all emotions, human.³²

Though women undoubtedly are female, this in no way guarantees that they will be 'feminine'.³³ As Toril Moi rightly says,

It is after all patriarchy, not feminism which has always believed in a true female/feminine nature: the biologism and essentialism which lurk behind the desire to bestow feminine virtues on all female bodies necessarily plays into the hands of the patriarchs.³⁴

Ann Rosalind Jones confirms that the new reading of Freud and object relations theory both confirm that sexuality is not a natural given, but rather is the consequence of social interactions among people and among signs.³⁵

Realization and the analysis of the 'self' leads us to question the existing norms about 'poetry' and about 'women'. The 'self' is realized through 'Dreams' and the 're-telling of myths'. Realization of the 'self' makes us question women's position in society. As Jeffrey Weeks rightly argues,

sexuality is something which society produces in complex ways. It is a result of diverse social practices that give meaning to human activities, of social definitions and self-definitions, of struggles between those who have power to define and regulate, and those who resist. Sexuality is not given; it is a product of negotiation, struggle and human agency.³⁶

Contemporary women poets talk about female sexuality and bring in a number of associations related to their bodies and the domesticities they are situated in. The reading and the expression of sexuality in these poets vary with their (women's) positioning in the society and their own experiences of domesticity.

¹ H.L. Pushpa. “Amruthamathi’s Monologue.” *Amruthamathi Swagatha*. Bangalore: Anveshane Prakashana, 1992. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 1.

² Rosalind Ann Jones. “Writing the body: towards an understanding of l’écriture feminine”, in Newton, Judith, and Deborah Rosenfelt. eds. *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*. New York: Methuen, 1985, p. 92

³ Jeffrey Weeks. *Sexuality*. New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 38

⁴ A.N.Krishna Rao, popularly known as Aa.Naa.Kru to the Kannada readers, is one of the important writers of the Progressive movement. He was a novelist and his novels portrayed women, poor and the socially downtrodden. His first literary work, a play, ‘*Maduveyo Manehaalo*’, was published in 1924 and was staged in different parts of Karnataka. From then on till 1935, he wrote eight novels among which, ‘*Sandhya Raaga*’ (The tune of the dusk) was prescribed as a text book for the S.S.L.C. students in 1944.

⁵ ‘*Nagna Sathya*’ and ‘*Shani Santaana*’ are two novel by Aa.Naa.Kru both published in 1951. ‘*Shani Santaana*’ came as an answer to the criticism bestowed upon ‘*Nagna Sathya*’.

⁶ A.N. Krishna Rao. *Saahithya mattu Kaamaprachodane*. Bangalore: Vijaya Prakashana, 1952, p. 4

⁷ *ibid.* p. 10. My translation.

⁸ This book includes clipping from the criticism against Aa.Naa.Kru that appeared in various news papers. It also carries letters written to the author by his fans appreciating his works.

⁹ Aa.Naa.Kru. “Literature and provocation of sexuality”, in A.N.Krishna Rao. 1952, p. 151

¹⁰ Sara Aboobacker. in Ammu Joseph, Ritu Menon and the core group eds. *Storylines*. Hyderabad: Women's World (India), 2003, p. 100

¹¹ Chandrashekar Kukkikatte. "*What is meant by freedom of expression*". Bangalore: Samskaara Bharati Karnataka, 2000, p. 1-6

¹² Rosalind Ann Jones. "Writing the body: towards an understanding of l'écriture feminine", in Judith Newton, and Deborah Rosenfelt. eds. *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*. New York: Methuen, 1985, p. 87

¹³ H.L. Pushpa. 1992. Tr. Chitra Panikker.

¹⁴ Suknya Maruti. "Ahalye." *Pocha Posa Kaavya Kadiru*. Rai, Viveka B.A. Mangalore: Prasaraanga Mangalore University, 2002. My translation. p. 73.

¹⁵ "Madhavi." H.L. Pushpa. 1992. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 44.

¹⁶ "Aadisuvaaadisuva Allama." *ibid*. Tr. Chitra Panikker and Mamta G Sagar. p. 3.

¹⁷ Madhavi Bhandari. "Siteya Hambala." *Kattuvadu Balu Kashta*. Udupi: Published by the poet, 1997. My translation. p. 4.

¹⁸ B.T. Lalitha Naik. "Chillareyaaguttiddene." Shashikala Veeraiahswamy and Suknya Maruthi. eds. *Pranayini*. Bangalore: Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha, 1996. Tr. Chaitra. p. 114.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Weeks. 1997, p 38.

²⁰ Indu Jain. "Mukti." *Kona Tera Kaun Sa*. New Delhi: Vaani Prakashan, 1993. Tr. Chitra Panikker and Mamta G Sagar. p. 47.

²¹ Jeffrey Weeks. 1997, p. 24.

²² K.R. Sandhyareddy. "Ii Pritiyolage." *Ii Preethiyolage..* Bangalore: Allama Prakashana, 1996.
Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 2.

²³ Gagan Gill. "Deh Ki Munder Par." *Ek Din Lautegi Ladki..* New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan,
1989. Tr. Chitra Panikker and Mamta G Sagar. p. 108.

²⁴ "Iccah Se Muh Pherkar." Gagan Gill. 1989. My translation. p. 112.

²⁵ Usha. P. Rai. "Nannolagina Naanu." *Kanasugalu Nanasugalu..* Bangalore: Satvika Prakashana,
1993. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p.12.

²⁶ U. Maheshwari. "Nannolagina Naanu." *Mugila Hakki.* Kasaragodu: Kasaragodu Prakashana,
1996. My translation. p. 50.

²⁷ Champa Vaid. "My Mother's Sermon." Kailash Vajpeyi, ed. *An Anthology of Modern Hindi Poetry.* New Delhi: Rupa and Co, 1998. Tr. Krishna Baldev Vaid, p. 92.

²⁸ Sa. Usha. "To Mother." *In their own voice.* Arlene Zide. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993. Tr.
A.K.Ramanujan, p. 239.

²⁹ Sunita Jain. "Mother." Kailash Vajpeyi, 1998. Tr. by the poet. p. 218.

³⁰ Kamla Bhasin and Nighat Said Khan. *Some questions on Feminism.* New Delhi: Kali for
Women, 1986, p. 15.

³¹ Savitha Nagabhushan. "Beejayajna." *Holemagalu.* Shimoga: Parisara Prakashana, 1996. Tr.
Chitra Panikker. p. 38.

³² M.R. Kamala. in G.S. Amur. "Mahila Kaavya Saadhane Haagu Samasyegalu." *Sudha Ugadi Visheshaanka* - 1999. Bangalore: The Printers Mysore Limited, 1999. Tr. Chitra Panikker.

³³ Toril Moi. "Feminist, Female, Feminine", in Belsey, Catherine, and Jane Moore, eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989, pp. 122-123

³⁴ *ibid.* p. 124

³⁵ Rosalind Ann Jones in Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt. 1985, p. 92

³⁶ Jeffrey Weeks. 1997, p. 25.

WOMEN'S POSITIONING IN SOCIETY

This woman
Is aware of everything
Of the cage, the trap net
and the torture cell

Ask her
Ask her about the cage,
She speaks of the experience one gets while
Flying in the open blue sky¹

- Katyayni

“*Ulatbansi*”

Saat Bhaiyon Ke Beech Champa

The notion that a woman should be free itself is alien to Indian culture, which believed that individuals born as women and the lower castes are fit only to be slaves. As subjects, they were allowed the status of slaves alone. During the

Nationalist movements and national struggle, concepts like '*Bharata Maate*', '*Karnataka Maate*' or '*Kannada Taayi*' depicting nation as mother/woman emerged in a prominent way. Not all of them agreed with such portrayal. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru while addressing a literary gathering, '*Rathnakar Rasik Mandal*' at Varanasi in the year 1933, strongly criticised the usage of Hindi language by the Hindi writers. Compared to other Indian languages, he condemned the sanskritisation and ornamentalisation of Hindi language in contemporary literature and insisted that Hindi writers should use the language that a common man can relate to. This speech was reported in '*Jagaran*', a Hindi newspaper, edited by Munshi Premchand on 20th November 1933.² Hindi writers strongly criticised Nehru for his stand and this issue was reported in various magazines and newspapers. Referring to this controversy later in his autobiography, '*Meri Kahani*' (My Story) Pandit Nehru wrote that the Hindu narrow mindedness is hidden behind the implementation of the feudal and the conservative attitudes prevalent in certain areas of Hindi literature and there is a necessity to condemn this. In this context he also said,

It is very strange that none could stop this imagination of a nation in the form of a person. We are so used to such idea and also have a tradition of imagining in this way. Bharat becomes '*Bharat Maata*', a beautiful woman; though ancient, looks still very young. Humiliated by the foreigners and other outsiders, she calls out in distress for her brave sons and daughters to protect her. Such portrayal will disturb and move hundreds of people and instigate them towards self-sacrifice. But Hindustan is basically a country of farmers and poor people whose portrait is not beautiful. Because

poverty can never be beautiful. Does this beautiful woman whom we have imagined as naked, haunch bent; represent the farmers and workers? Or is she the representative of that small section of oppressors who have forced rigid and harsh systems on the common people and have categorised a large section of mankind as untouchables? We try to suppress the truth by our imaginary creations and escape ourselves from the facts of day-to-day life.³

Portrayal of the nation in the form of a woman – beautiful, weak, pleading for mercy continues till today (see images: ‘magazine cover I’, page. 231). The nationalists’ struggle wanted to free this ‘woman’ from (colonial) slavery. Therefore a woman’s aspiration for freedom from slavery itself comes as a contrast in a very big way to what was believed till then. India the nation was portrayed as a woman and images condemning physical atrocities on women were being portrayed in every field of life. Such images were highlighted at public meetings and were used by political parties like Congress, Communist, Left and other liberal political parties and transcended all ideological constraints. This demand for freedom for women was later picked up by Women’s groups who organized themselves to fight against atrocities on women. Then, there was a shift from demand for freedom of the ‘nation’, which was in an abstract form, to the actual women of the nation (see Images: ‘magazine cover II’, page. 231). Such portrayals are still available abundantly in the form of images and literatures in popular culture.

Right from the days of Nationalist movement, thorough ground was being prepared for women's struggle which in the later years lead to the emergence of feminism in the Indian context. The concepts of 'nationalism', 'freedom' and 'women' got bound in a very strange way. On the one hand the nationalist movement was for the freedom of a 'nation' which was seen in the form of a woman – a mother, on the other hand for the 'nation's women' it was a shift from the colonial bondage to domestic bondage or captivity within their homes. In the post-colonial times the responsibility of protecting the '(mother) land', which was snatched back from the colonial rulers, came up in a bigger way. For women freedom came in the form of confinement. Therefore, nationalism has to be considered as an important step in the case of women's resistance to the oppressions they face and towards the voicing of dissent, which is articulated more visibly and more clearly, in the post independence era in India.

Kannada Nationalism and '*Karnataka EekekaraNa ChaLuvaLi*'⁴ or the movement for unification of Karnataka emerged side by side the Indian Nationalist movement. Kannada Nationalism in a way was a part of the bigger Nationalism that had spread all over the country. It derived its models from the larger context of Indian Nationalism.

Kannada Nationalism, Kannada Identity and Women:

Being a Kannadiga and invoking Kannadaness is considered as a true quality of a Kannadiga. First of all we need to understand what this Kannadaness is and who is this Kannadiga who invokes this Kannadaness. It is needless to say

that the Kannadaness and Kannadaity would lead to the creation of ‘Kannadiga’(s). But who are these Kannadigas? What is their Kannadaness and where and how these Kannadaity are evident are the most important questions. Imbibing certain attitudes and expressing them through certain acts allows a person to qualify as a Kannadiga and claim his or her Kannadaness.

To understand who this Kannadiga is and what are the elements that lead to their claiming of Kannadaness, we need to know a few more things. It is interesting to observe that the geographical and linguistic space of Karnataka was seen as a woman during the colonial period. Giving a feminine form to language and geographical spaces like land, State, Kannada soil, etc., in a way gives rise to the notion of the ‘Kannada Mother’, which in turn leads to the birth of the ‘Kannada Son’ or the sons of the soil. It is a son’s duty to protect his mother and sisters. It is his foremost duty to see to it that their honour and integrity are not tarnished by evil forces. Therefore, ‘to protect’ is to defend the virtues of their women. This is possible only through protecting their chastity. Thus the notion of an outsider attacking the land is equated with the raping of a woman vis-à-vis rape of the land. This image of rape and atrocities on the woman’s body recurs in the form of visual and verbal codes in literature, other mediums of art and popular culture and still prevails abundantly taking various forms (see Images: ‘magazine cover I’, page. 232).

Boldness, bravery and valour are qualities that uphold the brilliance of a man’s character. These same qualities in a woman would tarnish her character, rather than radiating it. Therefore, when one says ‘*your valour is your mother’s*

spirit'⁵; the 'you' refers to the male. It is commonly seen that these revolutionary qualities emerge all over Karnataka all of a sudden during *Kannada Rajyothsava*. The chief motive here is to protect Kannada Mother and remember our duties as her children. One of the foremost duties of a Kannadiga is to protect the 'Daughter of Mother India',⁶ the Kannada Mother who is addressed as 'Kannada Raajeshwari'⁷ and 'Kannadaambe'.⁸ Protecting the Kannada Mother is the duty of the son because she is a woman and relies on her son for protection. Since it is conventional for a woman to depend on man for her security, it is the responsibility of a Kannadiga to protect Kannada women along with the Kannada Mother. Although the women of Karnataka are part of the masses grouped as 'Kannadigas' they don't seem to have any definite responsibilities. One finds more poems on Karnataka, Kannada, Kannadaness by men poets than by women. There are various other reasons for poetry by men to become more popular and be more easily available. The Kannada identity of Kannadness is not as easily available to women as it is to men. The identity of Kannada women lies more prominently in their caste, creed, family, origin, colour, socio-economic status than in their Kannadaness. Therefore, but for a handful of women in Karnataka belonging to privileged classes (the ones who have access as participants to poets' meets and political gatherings), most others do not get opportunities to express their Kannadaness as easily and with as much intensity as men usually do.

Men, who take up the responsibility of protecting 'their women', tend to create an atmosphere that will allow none others but only them to protect their women. Thus they gain control and supremacy over their women and exhibit their power over women, which automatically fall into their hands. In such power

relations, men enjoy a better social position. Those who once fought to free the woman (mother land) from colonial oppression later became oppressors. To maintain this hierarchy women's speech, their movement and the presentation of a woman's self are all watched and commented on in society. In a sarcastic poem, the Kannada poet Vijaya Dabbe writes:

Be fearless.
Never worry.
As long as you don't
lift up your heads
men will surround you, guard you
as if they were your eyes⁹

Every dominant ideology creates its own 'ideal woman' to suit its agendas. Thereby roles are subscribed for this ideal woman to perform within the spaces allotted to her in the society. She is introduced as the 'new Indian woman' and her image is highlighted among the masses through the medium of popular culture like cinema, television, advertisements, etc. Pointing to the emergence of the discourse associated with the 'new Indian woman', Rajeswari Sunder Rajan notes that, it is

a construction which serves not only to reconcile in her subjectivity the conflicts between tradition and modernity in Indian society, but works also to deny the actual conflict that women existentially register as an aspect of their lives¹⁰

Presently an ideal Indian woman projected at large is a Hindu woman dedicated to "her family". She is one who would not cross the barriers set for her

by the male dominant social structures. This ideal Indian woman preciously values *kumkum*, *sindoor*, bangles, *mangalasuthra*, and other signifiers. The ‘new Indian woman’, who is also the ‘ideal woman’, is identified as the ‘Hindu woman’, by metaphors associated with that particular religion. Apart from the Hindu fundamentalists the ‘secular’ State too circulates such notions.

To give a suitable example, some where in the late nineties the Bangalore Traffic Police department came out with an advertisement to promote road safety which was put up all over the city. These huge hoardings had the image of a red traffic signal light on its left end under which it was written “*If you ignore this RED today*”. The right side of the hoarding had a line drawing of a woman’s face highlighted by her red *bindi* with the words “*She may never wear RED tomorrow*” (see Images: ‘an advertisement by the Bangalore traffic police issued in the interest of public’, page. 233) Similar associations can be traced in various forms of popular culture and literature.

Therefore, an ideal Indian woman is understood as the one who strives towards re-establishing the norms set by the patriarchal society where femininity subscribes to obedience, loyalty and submission. What we are witnessing today comes to us in the name of tradition in a very dangerous way.

The message that comes across is that people do not have any problems to accept a modern woman as long as she does not disturb the patriarchal structure. Only by maintaining the patriarchal system there can be a peaceful and a happy family, they preached.

An attempt is being made to erase heterogeneity and diversity within the concept of 'Indian Woman'. At this point of time when women are falsely portrayed in a vicious manner limited space is available for women poets to express their views. The positioning of women in a specific society is done along the lines of the dominant ideology. All the other identities of women that are beyond this frame are conveniently erased. Feminist cultural histories emphasize the ways in which social convention has tended to operate on behalf of the dominant group, and norms of femininity have worked in the interests of men.

Late seventies and early eighties seem to be a vibrant period for women in the National scene. Women in groups organised themselves into feminist and activists' factions throughout the country and placed demands for women belonging to various sectors of society. In Karnataka, 'Vimochana'¹¹, one such group emerged in 1979. 'Sthreelekha', a sister concern of Vimochana is the first feminist bookstore based in Bangalore. Streelekha started some years after Vimochana, has become a platform for the publication activities of Vimochana.¹² When it was still believed that woman's place was inside the house these women activists in organisations like Vimochana fought against the harassment women faced within the house and at public places. Songs were written and sung by women as they marched with placards and posters highlighting various issues. Poetry has always been a powerful medium through which women's organisations have placed their demands and communicated it to the public.

Various literatures and magazines voicing issues related to women appeared during the late seventies and early eighties. One such attempt was

‘*Mahila Vimochane*,’¹³ a booklet on emancipation of women and was brought out in Kannada by the *Samudaya Samanvaya Samithi* in 1979. Small magazines edited and written by women activist groups created space for poetry by women. Some of the important ones among them are, ‘*Achala*’ published by *Jaagruthi Mahila Adhyayana Kendra*, ‘*Kahale*’ by *Samyuktha Mahila Vedike*, the Karnataka Chapter of Joint Women’s Programme (JWP). A group of feminist activists not associated with any political or private organisations but working independently towards women’s cause started ‘*Manasa*’ a magazine in Kannada.

In Kannada as well as in Hindi women’s writing in general and women’s poetry in particular emerged along the grass-root activism. Poetry particularly focusing on specific demands of women or in voicing their dissent was never considered as “literature”. ‘Women’s literature’ that was more inclined towards activism was also ruled out from being ‘good literature’ and branded as ‘bad literature’. Such writings were usually not entertained in the anthologies published and reviewed as literature by the main stream.

Though women writers remained secluded at large from actively participating in *dharnas* and *morchas* as activists, or in any such struggle for women’s rights, it is the activism of the late seventies and early eighties that has provided a thorough background for the emergence of contemporary poetry.

In a patriarchal society, ‘the woman’ appears as girl child, young adult, an adolescent, married, unmarried, widowed and old. All through their life women carry the baggage of femininity and womanhood forced on them for the

convenience of the patriarchal society. Therefore, within a patriarchal society, to argue on behalf of women for their right to power or act according to their will, questioning their exclusion from the seats of power and to demand their inclusion is not an easy task. It sometimes does not even take the form of dissent. Hegemonic exercises and hierarchical practices of power over the powerless and marginalized are ingrained in society. Certain happenings, though sectional notions, are considered as the holistic notion of a people. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White rightly say that,

The list of inhabitants of the periphery becomes a carnivalesque group – the mad, the poor, women and workers/the handicapped – who are idealized as outside the power centre.¹⁴

Women's contribution towards economic growth is seen as an extension of the contribution of their male partners on whom they depend upon. Their restriction to certain private and social spheres and to believe and make them believe that this is natural itself is a notion considered as very normal and socially accepted. Most of the times the so-called 'whole' excludes the under-privileged, the physically and economically weak and those who are not directly related to the State.

Contemporary women's poetry and activism seem to have understood the subtle politics played behind the positioning of women in a society. They question this and resistance to such politics is vehemently expressed. Contemporary poetry also condemns the power game and demands justice from the patriarchal society.

It addresses various social issues in general and those related to women in particular.

Now let us look into some such examples from both Kannada and Hindi. Contemporary women's poetry questions the naturalness of the marginalisation of women. It strongly believes that women's rights have been snatched away. In '*I had Hidden*', a Kannada poem, Du Saraswathi says,

Dreams, whispers, colours
tied in a white cloth,
safely hidden,
hidden in the womb
has been stolen.....
I do not know why
I do not know how.....¹⁵

The age-old practices of female infanticide, rape, domestic violence are all accepted silently by the society. Women poets bring to light atrocities inflicted on women in various social spheres, at different stages of their life. Madhavi Bhandari (Kannada) in her poem writes,

. . . . craving for your love
she gave birth to a son
forcibly throwing it out
when she knew it's an unwanted girl¹⁶

Hema Pattanashetty (Kannada) brings to light the insecurity, inferiority and fear inculcated in women by birth.

As the eleventh among ten, I won't live

Nothing will match my vagina, my clan-name, my pulse....¹⁷

Even before a girl grows old enough to get married, she is seen as someone who does not belong to the family in which she is born. The saying that 'A bride given away, is out of clan' or proverbs like 'A woman is somebody else's treasure' are a part of everyday life and they are comfortably accepted in the language system. This lack of a sense of belonging becomes a part of women's identity.

They belong neither to their parent's family nor to their husband's. If they are someone else's treasure in one place in the other they are some one who has come from outside. This uncertainty and identity of an outsider stretch inside the home and to areas beyond home and family. Such alienation is efficiently addressed in the poems by Gagan Gill (Hindi). She writes,

Father says:

We have not parted yet, you're

Still there in me like a sorrow.

Father says:

Do not feel sad; now on

The sorrow is your father.¹⁸

The documentation of personal experiences in women's poetry is extended to the public spheres as well and addresses the issues related to women's positioning in society. Social issues like dowry deaths, sexual harassment, problems of the girl child, female foeticide etc. are dominant themes of the contemporary women's poetry.

'*Aged at Thirty*', a poem by Saraswathi (Kannada) portrays different phases in the life of a girl child that makes her grow much older than what she is.

Facts and issues related to the lives of other women, gathered as news or heard as true stories form themes for women's poets. On the 3rd of February '88 three sisters in Kanpur hung themselves to save their parents from paying a hefty dowry. Savitha (Kannada) renders this incident in her poem. She writes,

some hearts became heavy
some eyes became watery
a few lips made sounds in distress and
kept quiet.¹⁹

This suicide and the society's reaction to such deaths in general as if they are very common becomes the theme of this poem. Archana Varma (Hindi) has written a poem about the Bhopal Gas tragedy that took the lives of people in hundreds²⁰. Pratibha (Kannada) writes about the Naina Sahni incident where the girl was burnt alive in the *tandoori* oven²¹. Saraswati in one of her poems refers to the Somalia war and people's insensitivity to death and disasters. She writes,

Guns dance along the food packets.

The Somalia disaster is so common on the TV that,

we who watch never feel that
we also are a part and should feel guilty.²²

Hindi poet and activist Katyayni addresses various issues dealing with the objectification of women, from prostitution to the miss world contest to the representation of women in poetry by male writers.

One night at 11.43 on the JB road at Delhi a woman was waiting for her customer. In Palamu a country doctor was trying all techniques to abort a woman...In Mumbai under the blue-pink glittering lights the last bit of cloth on a woman was stripped off.....and the poem continues.....Exactly at the same time at Nelson Mandela's country a dais is being prepared for the Miss Universe contest. Here the poet after his pleasant dinner puffs off cigarettes to invoke the representative ideal woman of the world in his poetry.²³

Contemporary poetry by women also documents the politics played by the mainstream in the presentation of women and women's experiences. Saraswathi (Kannada) in her poem '*What Should I Document?*' asks,

that which I saw
that which I heard
that I had experienced
all that is yours!
everything!
is for you

recorded in the pages of history.

Then what did I see?

What did I experience?

What should I document....?²⁴

Further the poem talks of the fear of young girls, the adolescence of girls that goes by unseen, about Rupa who was burnt in the ‘sati’ pyre, and the mothers who age suppressing their dreams. ‘*What should I document?*’ is an interesting poem that says all these are unheard by history and there is no space for documenting women’s experiences.

Similarly the notion of history and its understanding is put to query in one of Pratibha’s poems in Kannada. The poet writes,

In the story you had told,

he was initially a prince

but was turned into a frog when she kissed him.

Children say that I do not know how to tell a story.²⁵

“*Where to Begin*” is a Hindi poem by Rajee Seth, which poses the question of the victimisation and the helplessness of women.

Yet

before birth

my mother pawned

a bit of me

to traditions.

A pound
the world around
slashed

In blazing realities
the rest
I myself
Could not endure.
Where do I begin?²⁶

One the one hand women's poetry talks of the victimisation and the helplessness women face, but at the same time many women poets also voice a continued resistance to such oppressions, which really brings in the ray of hope. Saraswathi (Kannada) says,

Do not stop weaving
If you are tired
Flow away in the form of
a river ²⁷

Women poetry makes it heard that women are not to be considered as weak, helpless and feeble beings. '*Ulatbansi*' is a poem in Hindi by Katyayni, where the poets specifies that,

This woman
Is aware of everything
Of the cage, the trap net
and the torture cell

Ask her
Ask her about the cage,
She speaks of the experience one gets while
Flying in the open blue sky

If asked of the of the trap net,
She speaks of the dream of
forgetting oneself in the wide ocean.

If asked of the torture cells
She starts singing songs of love.

Mysterious are the contradictions made by this woman
Know it
and beware. ²⁸

Similar traits about women's positioning in society can be seen in Kannada and Hindi. Themes and issues addressed are similar. Poems in both the languages voice resistance alike. They sensitise issues related to women. Women poets do not restrict themselves for women's cause alone. Instead they also wrote about various other human-interest stories like war, poverty, etc., but they viewed the world and posed questions from a feminist's perspective. This helped to strengthen their poetry and their approach to life on the whole. They proved that women will not have a special 'women's sensibility' restricted to domesticity and sexuality alone, instead, women's sensibilities are not very different from that of

men's but in times have proved to be much more sensitive. Though the main agenda of the contemporary women's poetry is aiming towards freedom of expression in a male dominant society, the approaches vary along the concerns the poets believe in and the issues they address, which again are rooted in their class, caste and cultural backgrounds.

¹ Katyayni. "Fear this woman." *Saat Bhaiyon Ke Beech Champa*. Panchkula: Aadhar Prakashan Private Limited, 1999. My translation. p. 11.

² Rekha Avasthi. *Pragathivaad aur Samaanaantar Sahithya*. New Delhi: Mc Millan Hindi-India, 1978, p. 3

³ Jawaharlal Nehru. *Meri Kahani*. New Delhi: Sasta Sahithya Mandal, 1965, pp. 635-36

⁴ S. Chandrashekar. Sahithya Mattu Charitre. *EekeekaraNa ChaLuvaLi* or the Movement for Unification of Karnataka started basically to bring together the Kannada speaking areas under one political roof. As Chandrashekar says, if independance is the product of Nationalism, Unification of Karnataka is the product of Kannada Nationalism (Uparashrathe). In 1920s at the Nagpur conference, the Indian National Congress announced that the forth coming states will be designed basis of languages. Movement for Unification of Karnataka was led by the regional congress commitee. This movement derieved its models from the larger context, that is Indian Nationalism.

⁵ From *Jaya He Karnataka Maathe*, a famous poem by Ku Vem Pu in C. P. Krishnakumar, ed. *Selected Poems of Poet-Laureate Dr. K.V. Puttappa*. Bangalore: Bappco Publication, 1984, pp.113 - 114

⁶ *ibid.* Kannada Mother is addressed as 'Bharata Jananiya Tanujaate'. Many poets related Kannada Nationalism with the main stream Nationalism. Karnataka Mathe is considered as the daughter of Baratha Mathe.

⁷ 'Kannada Rajeshwari' is a poem addressed to the Kannada land as the mother. Ahmed, Nissar. Bahirantara. Bangalore: Kiran Prakashana, 1990

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Vijaya Dabbe. "Narimanigalige Ondu Kivimaatu." *Iruttave*. Mysore: Suruchi Prakashana, 1975.

Tr. Tejaswini Niranjana.

¹⁰ Rajeswari Sunder Rajan. *Real and Imagined Women* Gender, Culture and postcolonialism.

London: Routledge, 1995, p. 129

¹¹ The women at Vimochana have been working in and around Karnataka since its inception, mostly to protest and defend the rights of women wherever and whenever they have been violated. They have reached out to women who are victimised for dowry and either killed, driven to suicide or are forced to leave violent home situations, women who are victims of rape, sexual harassment, wife beating, of bigamous husbands or desertion etc. Vimochana undertakes projects to suit the specific needs of women victims of violence and thereby has been lending a confidence and helping hand for them to accept life in a better way.

¹² The publication activities of Vimochana include bringing out magazines and brochures on women's issues. It is a place much cherished by everyone interested in women's writing and women's studies. It also doubles as a meeting place for women.

¹³ S. Malathi. *Mahila Vimochane*. Bangalore: Samudaya Samanvaya Samithi, 1979.

¹⁴ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, "The politics and Poetics of Transgression" as quoted in 'Representing Women: Re-presenting the Past', in *The Feminist Reader*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989. (Pg, 71)

¹⁵ Saraswathi. Du. "I had hidden." *Henedare Jedanante*. Bangalore: Ila Prakashana, 1997. Tr. Chitra Panikker and Mamta G Sagar. p. 5.

¹⁶ Madhavi Bhandari. "March 8 Bandaaga..." *Kattuvadu Balu Kashta..* Udupi: Published by the poet, 1997. Tr. Chaitra. p. 57.

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- ¹⁷ Hema Pattanashetty. "Hattarali Hannondaagi." *Virahotsava*. Bangalore: Kannada Sangha, Sheshadripuram College, 1983. Tr. Tejaswini Niranjana. p. 34.
- ¹⁸ Gagan Gill. "Pita Ne Kaha-Ek." and "Pita Ne Kaha-Do." *Andhere Mein Buddha*. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1996. Tr. Chitra Panikker and Mamta G Sagar. pp. 11-12.
- ¹⁹ Savitha Nagabhushan. "88, February 3." *Chandranannu Kareyiri Bhoomige..* Malladihalli: Samvada Prakashana, 1991. My translation. p. 25.
- ²⁰ Archana Varma. "Bhoopal 8." *Lauta Hai Vijayta*. Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1993. p. 81.
- ²¹ Prathibha Nandakumar. "Naina Sahni." *Kavadeyaata..* Bangalore: Kannada Sangha Christ college, 1998. p. 74.
- ²² Saraswathi Du. "Naavoo Shameelu." *Henedare Jedanante*. Bangalore: Ila Prakashana, 1997. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 17.
- ²³ Katyayani, "Ulatbansi." *Saat Bhaiyon Ke Beech Champa*. Panchkula: Aadhar Prakashan Private Limited, 1999. My translation.
- ²⁴ Saraswathi Du. "What should I document?" *Henedare Jedanante*. Tr. Chitra Panikker and Mamta G Sagar. p. 1.
- ²⁵ Nandakumar, Prathibha. "Story." *Kavadeyaata..* Bangalore: Kannada Sangha Christ college, 1998. Tr. Chitra Panikker. p. 64.
- ²⁶ Rajee Seth. "Where to begin." *An anthology of modern Hindi poetry*. Kailash Vajpeyi. New Delhi: Rupa & Co 1998, p. 149.

²⁷ Du, Saraswathi. "To weave is to weave like a spider." *Henedare Jedanante*. Bangalore: Ila Prakashana, 1997. My translation. p. 3.

²⁸ Katyayni. 1999. My translation. p. 11.

CONCLUSION

This research is centred on poetry by women and looks at gender as a social construct. It attempts to understand and deal with gender associations defined along the lines of patriarchies, which form a significant part of a society's culture.

I have chosen to study poetry written by women in two different languages Kannada and Hindi. Comparative Literature has accommodated various perspectives of looking into literatures. It is a discipline that has always proved to be inclusive and comprehensive. In this research, while looking at poetry by women, I preferred to use post-colonial, feminist and cultural studies approaches as methodological tools to build up my argument. This allows me to perceive gender as an important factor over many other approaches to literature. As gender is a social construction, it also allows me to look at the writings by women not just as part of literature but also as a product of a male dominant society. This in turn facilitates me to trace patriarchies and identify the resistance shown by women towards them.

This theoretical position allowed me to understand contemporary poetry by women written in Kannada and Hindi, not just as part of contemporary literature, but also as a product of a specific community in a distinct society. This raises fundamental questions about definitions of literature itself and its set norms. In this thesis I have used comparisons to strengthen the analysis that literature is a

cultural product. This position also allows studying literature beyond various conceptual boundaries. It allows for understanding literature as both an academic project and as the product of a particular social formation.

The period I selected for research is the post-eighties, i.e., 1980 to 2000, which also allow me to cite the works from a post-colonial location. The post-colonial situation allows looking into the politics of *representation* and *nationhood* in respect to women subjects through women's writing. The periodisation usually seen in the histories of Kannada and Hindi literature leave almost no space for the contribution by women. The contribution by women in the field of literature demands different tools for categorisation and periodisation which will recognise the voices and views of the women writers. Three movements in the history of women's writing from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary period have been identified under which poetry by women has been discussed. They are the nationalist movement, movement of self-expression and the movement of identity politics.

The reforms proposed by the nationalists were an attempt to construct the new Indian Woman to suit their own agenda. While doing this they had to consider the issues related to women without damaging or maligning the new concept of the ideal Indian woman which was reflected in the image of '*Bharatha Mathe*' (Mother India) or '*Karnataka Maathe*' (The Kannada Mother), icons, representing a cultural model of the sacred Nation. The concept of the Indian nation was perceived in the form of a 'woman', as a mother/goddess and this kind of portrayal was being made in almost all the visual and verbal systems of

signification (see Images: 'Bharat Mata' and 'Mahatma Gandhi', page. 231). The image of '*Karnataka Maathe*' was being constructed along the lines of '*Bharatha Maathe*'. Mother Karnataka was being lauded as the daughter of Mother India. The bond between mother and daughter was being celebrated. This bond also gets highlighted and extended as a representation of the sacred bond between mothers and daughters of the nation. As both the formations took place under similar situations, neither the mothers nor the daughters were self-dependent to create an independent space for the women of this nation. The notion of sacredness of the mother-daughters' bond emerged hand in hand with a notion of dependence and the responsibility to defend and protect the sanctity of the nation automatically fell into the hands of 'sons of the soil'. Construction of the ideal Indian womanhood and the construction of the nation in the form of mother were carried on simultaneously.

While India, the nation, was portrayed as a woman, images condemning physical atrocities on women were being portrayed in a bigger way in every field of life. While the notion that a woman should be free is itself an alien concept for Indian culture and as subjects they were allowed the status of slaves alone, the Indian National movement came as a boon. Therefore, a woman aspiring to be free from slavery itself comes as a contrast to what was believed till then. Groups of women who organized themselves to fight against the atrocities inflicted on women later picked up this demand for freedom of the woman. There was a shift from the abstract notion of a 'nation' to the actual woman. Since the days of Nationalist movement, time and again thorough ground was being prepared for women's struggle which in the later years led to the emergence of feminism in the

Indian context. The concepts of 'nationalism', 'freedom' and 'women' got bound in a very strange way. Therefore, nationalism has to be considered an important step in the case of women's resistance to the oppression they are subjected to and towards their voicing dissent, which though began to be articulated more visibly and clearly in the post independence era in India.

Activism and women's movements emerged and gained visibility in the late seventies, in some ways changing the trajectories of women's expressions in literature. As a result, in the post eighties assertion of the woman's self and a strong resistance to the prevailing patriarchies surface in women's writing. It was in the eighties that women entered the genre of poetry in a prominent way and women's writing gained an identity of its own. It was only in the post eighties that the histories of literatures began to be evaluated for women and also re-written by women in many Indian languages. Contemporary writings by women draw attention towards gender inequality with more clarity. Gender politics seems to be one of the important issues for most of the women writers. The shift in approach from universal spaces to gender-specific spaces can be traced in the poetry of the nineties. Therefore, post eighties or by and large contemporary writing by women gains more importance.

As an outcome of this exercise, ideas of domesticity, female sexuality and women's positioning in society are all questioned, interrogated and re-defined by women writers. The dominant male literary trends of the past and also the ones, which are still in practice, are also questioned.

Women's poetry in the context of domesticity - motherhood, marriage, domestic violence, home and the other spaces and associated metaphors of domesticity are examined. Contemporary women's poetry shows resistance to both the sacred and the profane roles assigned to women. Contemporary women writers are aware, that patriarchies have conveniently made use of the confusion between the 'feminine' and 'femininity' to put women politically, economically and culturally on an unequal position, a position inferior to men in society and that this socially constructed 'gender' is the main cause for the patriarchal hierarchy within the family.

Stereotypical roles assigned to women and portrayed in cultural productions like literature, other mediums of art and the popular culture are resisted in women's writing. The social censorships that women go through which used to be left unsaid as if 'natural' is identified and questioned in contemporary women's poetry. Anger and physical assault inflicted on women is often referred to voice protest against domestic violence.

Contemporary women's poetry recognises the range of cultural tools embedded in the society that efficiently control the female body and sexuality. Censorship is one such important tool. A great deal of pressure is executed on both writers and readers, especially when sexuality concerned with women is talked about. When male writers are restricted from writing on issues concerned with female sexuality, idea of women expressing themselves on the lines of sexuality in their writing most of the times remain beyond imagination. Whenever references to female sexuality appear in the public sphere, individuals,

conservatives, fundamentalists, State and other patriarchal agencies show a tendency of becoming cultural guards creating loud noises or strongly attacking the writers to suppress their raised voices. Three major controversies from Kannada re-establish this argument. In the contemporary poetry by women, assertion of female sexuality is accomplished by the retelling of Myths. Retelling of the myths is a point of rupture that allows women to openly talk about the female body and sexuality in their poems. They establish that the woman's body where sexuality has a main role to play is the site of pain and oppression. The desires of women are physically and socially trapped in the body. When the significance of the body is realized, the importance of 'woman's self' within that body is also realized. In this dissertation, censorships of literature, myths and mythologies, preconceived notions regarding womanhood, women's role and certain aspects of the femininity are identified to discuss issues related to female sexuality. I believe that this attempt further opens up various other perspectives to discuss the representation of female sexuality in women's writing.

Contemporary women's poetry seems to have understood the subtle politics in the positioning of women in a society. Women poets bring to light atrocities inflicted on women in various social spheres, at different stages of their life. Facts and issues related to the lives of other women, gathered as news or heard as true stories form themes for women's poetry. Women's activism has contributed towards the strengthening of contemporary women's poetry. The documentation of personal experiences in women's poetry extends to the public spheres as well and addresses the issues related to women's positioning in society. This dissertation highlights the patriarchal perspectives of the political and the

socio-cultural movements like the Indian nationalism and the Kannada nationalism in the formation of the Indian/Kannada 'womanhood' and its role in the positioning of women in the society. It also draws attention to those aspects of popular culture that defines an ideal Indian woman and her place in a patriarchal society. It also makes an effort to recognise the dissent voiced in contemporary women's poetry. In a patriarchal society, popular cultures like the media, advertisements, women's magazines, films and television serials, etc., all contribute towards redefining women's role and thereby women's position in a society. All these areas open up new spaces for future research on women's positioning in society. Contemporary poetry by women also document the politics played by the mainstream in the representation of women and women's experiences.

Women poets have not restricted themselves to women's causes alone, proving that women will not have a special 'women's sensibility', restricted to domesticity and sexuality alone. Instead women's sensibilities are not very different from that of men's but in times have proved to be much more sensitive.

Contemporary women's poetry in Kannada and Hindi show similar traits while retaining their vibrant diversities located in the varied socio-cultural backgrounds of the poets. Themes and issues addressed are similar. Poems in both the languages voice resistance alike. They sensitise issues related to women. They raise questions addressing the social construction of gender. This helps us to make a generalisation that women's writing in India and women poetry in particular has taken a definitive turn in past two decades. The similarities that surface obviously

pronounce that similar reactions might have come up in other Indian languages as well. But the reference to customs, tradition, food and ritual, beliefs and popular mythologies, proverbs and slang, reference to the classical literatures, reference to poets, writers and characters from literatures visible in contemporary women's poetry in Kannada and Hindi are all language, region and culture specific. This points to the fact that 'women's poetry' in the Indian context is not a homogenous category, but a mode of resistance in diversity, which again is specific to language, class, caste and patriarchies that are region and culture specific. More than anything, contemporary women's poetry invokes hopes for freedom and better lives within a patriarchal society. This understanding helps us to arrive at a hypothesis that similar things may have happened in most other literatures in the Indian context and the contemporary women's poetry in the Indian context have taken a definitive turn in post eighties retaining its diversity even while voicing the dissent.

Contemporary women's poetry is a vast area of study within which this work is a humble attempt limited by time period, area of study and methodology. By using specific poems from Kannada and Hindi to support the arguments, I have tried to draw attention towards the multidimensional and multifaceted features of contemporary women's poetry associated with varied socio-cultural backgrounds of the poets. Their dreams and aspirations vary along these diverse backgrounds. The diversities of the contemporary poetry by women itself is an interesting area which opens up varied possibilities for research.

This research opens up directions for future studies in women's writing. The post-eighties women's poetry has a rich background like the Indian nationalist movement - the movement for the unification of Karnataka, various literary and socio-cultural movements and the women's movement of the seventies. Much work needs to be done in these areas in relation to women's writing in general and women's poetry in particular. Thus the contemporary women's poetry allows for further research focusing on the specificities located in the regional, linguistic, caste and cultural realms.

IMAGES



'Karnataka Nandini'
vol 3, issue 3, Feb 1920



'Veeramaathe'
vol 11, issue 3, Aug 1962



'Saraswathi'
vol 28, issue 5, May 1949

The magazines in Kannada,
'Karnataka Nandini' and 'Veeramaathe'
were edited by Nanjanagoodu Tirumalamba
and 'Saraswathi' was edited
by R. Kalyanamma.



'Bharat Mata', offset print, 1937,
painting by P.S.Ramachandran Rao.



'Mahatma Gandhi'
oleograph, 1925.

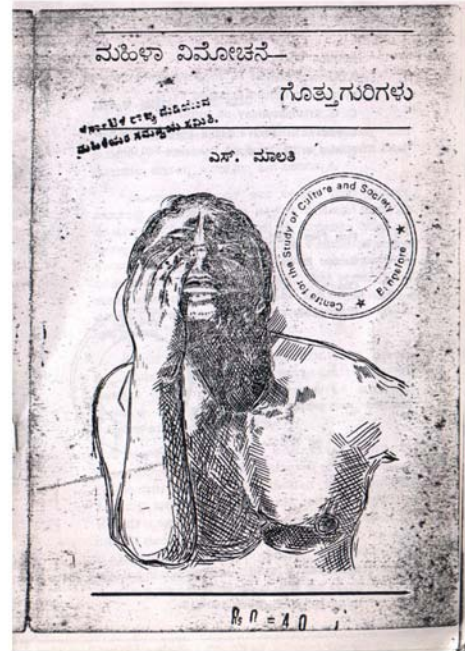
Ref: "The 'art...of politics' ", The Hindu, Magazine, 17 Aug 2003

Mag cover-1



'Imperialistic Attack on Karnataka'
Pub: Karnataka Vimochana Ranga
1995

Mag cover-2



'Mahila Vimochane'
Pub: Samudaya Samanvaya Samiti
1979



An advertisement by Bangalore Traffic Police issued in the intrest of public

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SYNOPSIS
OF
Gender, Patriarchy and Resistance:
Contemporary Women's Poetry in Kannada and Hindi (1980 – 2000)

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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Gender, Patriarchy and Resistance:

Contemporary Women's Poetry in Kannada and Hindi (1980 – 2000)

This study is an attempt to understand contemporary women's poetry in Kannada and Hindi between 1980 and 2000 by focussing on questions of gender, patriarchy and resistance.

Resistance by women in a patriarchal society takes various forms including expressions of it through cultural productions like art, literature and speech. Women's poetry is one among them. Consequently, poetry becomes important not only as an art form but also as an expression of resistance. In this dissertation I focus on contemporary poetry by women poets in order to examine issues of gender, patriarchy and resistance. This research is an attempt towards understanding the subtleties of oppressions and gendered relationships in today's society.

The contemporary women's poetry is an area that opens up debates related to literature and women's point of view in a patriarchal society. Therefore women's writing is not only a part of literature but also an area that discloses nuances of the experience of a specific community in a given society.

This study has two important dimensions. One is that it is on contemporary women's poetry that draws attention towards women's voices considering women's writing not just as literature but as a tool resisting

oppressions faced within a patriarchal society. The other is that it is an attempt to incorporate this area of study under the larger umbrella of Comparative Literature.

This dissertation intends to analyse poetry by women from two languages, i.e., Kannada and Hindi. The Kannada women poets are located in Kannada language vicinity whereas the Hindi women poets are located in the Hindi belt, i.e., in case of Hindi, poets are from a range of Hindi speaking areas. Women's poetry in Hindi is identified from those cultural centres where women writing can be appropriated, tolerated, and/or an environment that could allow women to write. Though Kannada and Hindi represent two different geographical spaces, in our opinion it is possible to compare poetry of one State/language with the poetry from another State/language. This approach will help in understanding various dimensions of the reactions by women from different parts of the country.

This research contributes to the field of women's writing by reopening debates through contemporary women's poetry. It also contributes to the field of Comparative Literature by adding in new methodological possibilities in the area for research. The methodology is proposed by bringing in essential tools from feminist studies, post-colonial studies and cultural studies under Comparative Literature. This helps to understand women's poetry as an academic project and also as a result of a particular social formation.

The thesis is organised into six chapters, including the conclusion. The first chapter, 'Introduction', has three parts. The first part briefly introduces the thesis, its contents and the intention of the work. The second part traces the

trajectories of Comparative Literature discipline. It reviews the development of Comparative Literature in India and then proposes the methodology for studying Contemporary Women's Poetry. While looking into poetry by women from Kannada and Hindi a methodology is derived by bringing three strands of thoughts, i.e., feminist studies and post-colonial studies supported by relevant analysis from cultural studies. The feminist position allows one to perceive gender as an important factor among many other aspects of literature. As gender is a social construction, the cultural studies position also allows looking at the writings by women not just as part of literature but also as product of a male dominated society. This facilitates us to raise the questions regarding changing patriarchies and in identifying the modes of resistance shown by women. The third and last part delineates the chapterisation of the thesis.

The second chapter titled as 'Women Writing: Creating a Space for Themselves', introduces the development of women's writing from the nationalist period till the eighties. To understand the arguments proposed by contemporary women's writing, it is essential to look into the formations of women's subjectivities shaped in women's writing till the eighties. Women's writing and ideas available in the literatures and magazines written and edited by women during the nationalist period examines how women etched a space for themselves through their writings. Women moulded new subjectivities for themselves through their writings. This was very important for them, as it gave them an opportunity to represent themselves as citizens of a new nation whose image was entirely based on its spiritual strength. The concept of 'Arya Mahila' the Aryan woman, portrayed by Tirumalamba in Kannada and Mahadevi Verma in Hindi, talked

about the notion of the self-dependent strong woman dedicated to her tradition but resistant to being a mere shadow of man. These narratives are read as resistance narratives for they also are opinions by women, their responses to the prevailing patriarchal structures and about the formation of women's subjectivities.

Then the chapter moves on to examine the literary movements and women's place in these movements. This chapter also reviews the relationship between women's writing and the literary histories and establishes how the mainstream literary histories have successfully marginalized women's writing.

The third chapter, 'The Literary – Cultural Background of Contemporary Women's Poetry', offers a different periodization in the history of literature, which can accommodate women's voices and views. The periodisation usually seen in the histories of Kannada and Hindi literature leave almost no space for the contribution by women. Three movements in the history of women's writing from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary period have been identified under which women's poetry from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary period is discussed. They are The Nationalist Movement (1920 – 1950), Movement of Self Expression (1940 – 1970) and The Movement of Identity Politics (1980 onwards). For the sake of convenience each movement is recognised under a specific period. This does not mean that the concerns of the movement do not move beyond the marked periodisation.

The reforms proposed by the nationalists were an attempt to construct the new Indian Woman to suit their own agenda. While doing this they had to

consider the issues related to women without damaging or maligning the new concept of the ideal Indian woman which was reflected in the image of '*Bharatha Maathe*' (Mother India) or '*Karnataka Maathe*' (The Kannada Mother), icons, representing a cultural model of the sacred Nation. The concept of the Indian nation was perceived in the form of a 'woman', as a mother/goddess and this kind of portrayal was made in almost all the visual and verbal systems of signification. The image of '*Karnataka Maathe*' was being constructed along the lines of '*Bharatha Maathe*'. Mother Karnataka was being lauded as the daughter of Mother India. The bond between mother and daughter was being celebrated. This bond also gets highlighted and extended as a representation of the sacred bond between mothers and daughters of the nation. As both the formations took place under similar situations, neither the mothers nor the daughters were self-dependent to create an independent space for the women of this nation. The notion of sacredness of the mother-daughters' bond emerged hand in hand with a notion of dependence and the responsibility to defend and protect the sanctity of the nation automatically fell into the hands of 'sons of the soil'. Construction of the ideal Indian womanhood and the construction of the nation in the form of mother were carried on simultaneously.

While India, the nation, was portrayed as a woman, images condemning physical atrocities on women were being portrayed on a larger scale in every field of life. While the notion that a woman should be free is itself an alien concept for Indian culture and as subjects they were allowed the status of slaves alone, the Indian National movement came as a boon. Therefore, a woman aspiring to be free from slavery itself comes as a contrast to what was believed till then. Groups

of women who organized themselves to fight against the atrocities inflicted on women later picked up this demand for freedom of the woman. There was a shift from the abstract notion of a 'nation' to the actual woman. Since the days of Nationalist movement, time and again thorough ground was being prepared for women's struggle which in the later years led to the emergence of feminism in the Indian context. The concepts of 'nationalism', 'freedom' and 'women' got bound in a very strange way. Therefore, nationalism has to be considered an important step in the case of women's resistance to the oppression they are subjected to and towards their voicing dissent, which though began to be articulated more visibly and clearly in the post independence era in India. Formal education for women was prioritized over all other demands both in Kannada and Hindi. The dissertation cites responses by women writers and looks into the debates regarding women's education and its contribution towards the construction of women's subjectivity. This chapter broadly deals with the literary and cultural background for contemporary women's poetry in Kannada and Hindi.

The fourth chapter, 'Reading through Prefaces', draws attention towards the structure and composition of the poetry anthologies. It notes how the 'forewords' by male writers and critics written in the collection of poems by women read women's experiences within the frames of femininity and work towards constructing literary canon for women's poetry. Expressions like '*woman's heart*' (a tender heart), '*woman's natural expression*', '*naturalness in her expression*', '*purely feminine consciousness*', etc were produced abundantly to analyse poems by women poets. If one examines carefully, these tools used for the analyses of women's poetry, instead of seeing it as an independent and a

vibrant new expression, tried to restrain it within the traditional framework and imposed patriarchal readings on it. Therefore if we go through these forewords and interpret them, we will have a picture of what the mainstream thinks of women's poetry. This helps to gather ideas about their notion of poetry in general, poetry by women and women as poets in particular. We get to know what these writers would prescribe for women and what kind of poetry they expect from them.

The fifth chapter entitled 'Major Themes' has three subchapters namely Domesticity, Sexuality and Women's positioning in society. Under these three recurring themes, contemporary women's poetry from Kannada and Hindi are discussed.

Women's poetry in the context of domesticity - motherhood, marriage, domestic violence, home and the other spaces as well as associated metaphors of domesticity are examined. Contemporary women's poetry shows resistance to both the sacred and the profane roles assigned to women. Contemporary women writers are aware, that patriarchies have conveniently made use of the confusion between the 'feminine' and 'femininity' to put women politically, economically and culturally on an unequal position, a position inferior to men in society and that this socially constructed 'gender' is the main cause for the patriarchal hierarchy within the family.

Contemporary women's poetry recognises the range of cultural tools embedded in the society that efficiently control the female body and sexuality.

Censorship is one such tool. A great deal of pressure is exerted on both writers and readers, especially when sexuality concerned with women is talked about. When male writers are restricted from writing on issues concerned with female sexuality, the idea of women expressing themselves in terms of sexuality in their writing is beyond imagination. Whenever references to female sexuality appear in the public sphere, individuals, conservatives, fundamentalists, State and other patriarchal agencies show a tendency of becoming cultural guards, creating loud noises or strongly attacking the writers to suppress their raised voices. Three major controversies from the literary and cultural sphere are discussed to re-establish this argument. In this dissertation, censorships of literature, myths and mythologies, preconceived notions regarding womanhood, women's role and certain aspects of the femininity are identified to discuss issues related to female sexuality.

Contemporary women's poetry seems to have understood the subtle politics in the positioning of women in a society. Women poets bring to light atrocities inflicted on women in various social spheres, at different stages of their life. Facts and issues related to the lives of other women, gathered as news or heard as true stories form themes for women's poetry. Women's activism has contributed towards the strengthening of contemporary women's poetry. The documentation of personal experiences in women's poetry extends to the public spheres as well and addresses the issues related to women's positioning in society. This dissertation highlights the patriarchal perspectives of the political and the socio-cultural movements like the Indian nationalism and the Kannada nationalism in the formation of the Indian/Kannada 'womanhood' and its role in

the positioning of women in the society. It also draws attention to those aspects of popular culture that defines an ideal Indian woman and her place in a patriarchal society.

The sixth and the final chapter offers a conclusion to the thesis and further indicates areas of research in the field of contemporary women's poetry. The diversities of the contemporary poetry by women itself is an interesting area which opens up varied possibilities for research. This research opens up directions for future studies in women's writing. The post-eighties women's poetry has a rich background like the Indian nationalist movement - the movement for the unification of Karnataka, various literary and socio-cultural movements and the women's movement of the seventies. Much work needs to be done in these areas in relation to women's writing in general and women's poetry in particular. Thus the contemporary women's poetry allows for further research focusing on the specificities located in the regional, linguistic, caste and cultural realms.

Major points that emerged in the analysis of gender, patriarchy and resistance in the contemporary women's poetry from Kannada and Hindi are as follows:

Women's writing does not fit into the parameters of periodisation usually followed in the histories of Kannada and Hindi literature. The contribution by women in the field of literature demands a different categorisation and periodisation, which accommodates their voices and views.

The political and the socio-cultural movements like the Indian nationalism and the Kannada nationalism with their patriarchal perspectives have played

active roles in the formation of the Indian/Kannada ‘womanhood’, in turn are responsible for women’s position in today’s society.

Women’s activism has contributed to the strengthening of contemporary women’s poetry. The documentation of personal experiences in women’s poetry extends to the public spheres as well and address issues related to women.

Women poets have not restricted themselves to women’s causes alone, proving that women do not have a special ‘women’s sensibility’, restricted to domesticity and sexuality alone. Instead, women’s sensibilities are not very different from that of men’s.

Contemporary women’s poetry in Kannada and Hindi show similar traits while retaining their vibrant diversities located in the varied socio-cultural backgrounds of the poets. Themes and issues addressed are similar. Poems in both the languages voice resistances alike. They sensitise issues related to women. They raise questions addressing the social construction of gender. This helps us to make a generalisation that women’s writing in India and women poetry in particular have taken a definitive turn in the past two decades. The comparison contributes to the analysis of problems addressed in the writings by women in relation to questions of gender, patriarchies and resistance. The similarities that emerge obviously pronounce that similar reactions might have come up from other Indian languages as well. But the reference to customs, tradition, food, ritual, beliefs and popular mythologies; proverbs and slang; reference to the classical literatures; reference to poets, writers and characters from literatures

visible in contemporary women's poetry; are all language, region and culture specific. This points to the fact that 'women's poetry' in the Indian context is not a homogenous category. It is a mode of resistance in diversity, which again is specific to language, class, caste and patriarchies that are region and culture specific. Such an understanding helps us to arrive at a hypothesis that similar things may have happened in most other literatures in the Indian context and the contemporary women's poetry in the Indian context have taken a definitive turn in post eighties retaining its diversity even while voicing the dissent.

The vast area of research emerging on women's writing and an urge to document women's expressions and experiences are to be understood as a conscious effort by women to create spaces for themselves from which they would be able to view the world. This research on contemporary poetry by women is an attempt to highlight these hitherto unexplored aspects of women's writings in Kannada and Hindi.

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