

CONSTRUCTING FEMALE SEXUALITY IN SELECT MALAYALAM FILM

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Women, as mothers, stand out in their emotional intensity and physical bonding with their children, which is, in fact, beyond the reach of patriarchal imagination and predictions. As feminists argue, it is this unique experience of “mothering” which gives new meanings to women’s lives as belonging to an apocalyptic community which to men appears as an alien, dark land.

Maternity discourses constitute a new feminist theoretical space that disproves the mystique propagated by patriarchy that woman becomes weak, vulnerable and helpless when she becomes a mother. On the contrary, as the feminist theoretical domain of maternity discourses propagates, woman’s maternity, her state of being a mother, gives her real strength and identity and causes her real emancipation. Maternity discourses constitute a new feminist theoretical realm that deconstructs the conceptual and practical patriarchal discourses.

These discourses create a feminist theoretical space for the re-emergence of the Woman-Mother as an active and articulate discursive figure. A feminist re-reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis celebrates a female-centred, semiotic realm as opposed to the paternal realm of the Symbolic. This feminist re-reading gives a scope for redefining Lacanian concepts like the psychic stages, phallus and so on. Rereading Lacanian concepts generates wonderful feminist theoretical possibilities like the overlapping or extension of psychic stages, the women-mothers’ proximity to phallus as subjects. These feminist theoretical possibilities constitute an interesting phenomenon - the Woman-Mother’s re-emergence in the signifying realm as an active and articulate discursive figure rendering the patriarchal man/father silent, passive and inarticulate. This leads to the creation of a new system of signification that is no longer phallogocentric but female centred, maternal-oriented. This also results in a new dyad model of family consisting of Woman-Mother and her children preventing paternal intervention.

French feminists like Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva oppose the reign of a phallogocentric universe with insights drawn in from women’s, bodily experiences. The French feminist theorizing heads towards an open, vocal, eloquent celebration of “mothering,” an experience of the body and the mind, as the model, the real source for female identity. French feminists make an attempt to expose how patriarchy stands hostile to the fulfillment of the female desires. By redefining woman’s “maternity” as the source of her real strength, the French feminists retain the focus on the paradigms of the “maternal feminine desire” manifest in the interconnectedness of women-mothers transcending generations, age and cultures.

Kalimannu, directed by Blessy, is about the concept of womanhood and woman's power on delivering a baby. Meera is a club dancer in Mumbai. She aspires to be on the big screen someday. In the journey on achieving the dream, she suffers many hurdles and still not close to her aim. At some point she decides to end her life. As luck would have it she meets a taxi driver Shyam. He changes her life from negative to positive in her prime. They marry and have a happy life. She progresses in her work getting item dance numbers and finally clinching her ticket to fame. But tragedy strikes on the preview of her movie, Shyam is involved in an accident which leaves him brain dead. Meera is devastated but she thinks of artificial insemination as a way to remember her husband. Thus she begins her crusade against the big bad world of legal complications. The film is about the struggle of a woman who uses technology to embrace motherhood after her husband is declared brain dead. The origin of life and joy of motherhood is portrayed in the film.

Motherhood in the contemporary society is analyzed in terms of scientific discourses that shape new reproductive technologies which focus on women's bodies and biological ability to become mothers. Maternity is a political choice and site of empowerment for women. The physical presence of man creates the systems of hegemony. Women by opting artificial methods to become a mother neglect the active significance of man. Medically appropriated technology like surrogacy or IVF makes mother powerful within the hegemonic structure of patriarchy.

The Malayalam movie *Kalimannu* which is directed by Blessy portrayed the glory of motherhood as well as womanhood. The notion of motherhood got glorified through the movie and gives awareness to present society about the sensitiveness and hardships of women during the process of becoming a mother. The movie is an eye opener to the society in order to make a change in the perspective of the society towards women.

The subject of women and the exercise of power are part of the representation of gender roles. Power of women is attributed as an ability to act effectively and intelligently on the occasions to make favourable decisions. So women have always exercised considerable power, which is not legitimized. This happens in the case of Meera. She is capable to make her own decisions in her life whereas the society consciously or unconsciously denied her right to make a decision to become a mother. This shows her power as mother and as a woman.

Society gives much concern towards the child than mother during the period of pregnancy. There is a view of parenthood that mother is only the conceiver. This creates a conflict in the ownership of the child, as to whom the child belongs to, either to mother who dedicated her womb for nine months to carry her baby or the father who created the progeny out of him. This concept got embedded in the social consciousness and hence mother becomes passive throughout. Hence women were not given the right to choose the reproductive ability. This was a tragedy for the women where they were forced by social compulsions and have no control over themselves. Thus the pleasure of motherhood achieves when women chooses the pain and sufferings of pregnancy by herself. According to Meera she has chosen her sufferings in order to become a mother. It was her own decision to become a mother which she considered her real power and strength. It was her courage to become a mother in between several controversies. Motherhood is a period of tensions insecurities and mental pain. Mother or a woman has given a specific status in mythologies. Indian cinema have also given certain role for mother and motherhood. Mothers are considered as the treasure keepers or receptacle of morality. It is for this reason that the protagonist was questioned by the society in the movie *Kalimannu*.

Meera, the protagonist of the film was a bar dancer and later an item dancer in film industry. This was reason for which the society questioned her motherhood. The right to become

a mother by getting the sperms from her husband even after his death was denied due to her past life and doubtful moral values .Meera was considered extremely immoral by the society.

Meera's decision to become a mother makes her empowered and strong in her life as a woman. The film portrays the glory of motherhood and the womb.Meera goes through several criticism in terms of her moral side as she was a bar dancer. The process of conceiving from dead husband through artificial insemination was considered as a real taboo by the society. This shows the misconception of biological reality by the society. The society is ignorant and static in certain beliefs and hereditary practices. With the legal support and biological possibility Meera could materialize her wish to become a mother. The right to become a mother is questioned in Meera's life. In the movie she clearly states that "only a women can have the privilege to become a mother so at least that right should not be denied from a woman"

In many cases women have no right to make a choice on pregnancy. In the movie the protagonist herself makes the decision to become a mother without the consent of anybody even her husband's. This is the way of getting empowered through real life situation.

The politics of maternity discourses places the experience of mothering as an integral and constituting element in the restructuring of active patriarchal society and the subversion of its phallogocentric constraints. It is the instinctual drive or the innate desire to give birth the never ending urge to create, that makes the woman-mother a non-symbolic, non-paternal creator- a strong opponent to the patriarchal realm of creativity. In reference to the ultimate creator that resides in Woman-Mother, Rich writes:

Out of her body the woman created man, created woman, created continuing existence. Spiritualized into a divine being, she was the source of vegetation, fruition, fertility of every kind. Whether she bore children or not, as potter and weaver she created first objects which were more than object,were works of art,thus of magic, and which were also the products of the earliest scientific activity,including the lore of herbs and roots, the art of healing and that of nurturing the young ... Woman did not simply give birth; she made it possible for the child to go on living. Her breasts furnished the first food, but her concern for the child led her beyond that one-to-one relationship...The human species is dependent on maternal...and in creating a situation in which they could nurture and rear...safely and effectively, women became the civilizers, the inventors of agriculture, of community, some maintain of language itself.(Of Woman Born 100-01)

The never-ending creativity in women, which Rich discusses, makes woman not only a producer and stabilizer of life but also a great "transformer." Woman mother's transforming power, her unimaginable power for survival, in contrast to the patriarchal power, is not the power over others but power of the self.

Womanhood and female sexuality are based on the male structured norms. Meera's decision to get pregnant through IVF was her decision which was not digestible to the society. She set an example as a single parent. It is mentioned in the movie that it is the first attempt in India to conduct IVF which is a process of combining egg and sperm manually in a laboratory

and transferring the embryo to the uterus. This became an issue of great concern and hence Meera had to face several oppositions. When media overpowers the news of Meera's decision, she reacts to them and discloses her wish to become a mother by saying that "I want justice, I want to become a mother." When woman makes the choice to get a child in the society it becomes a great matter of opposition. In earlier period it was the man who decides the choice of getting a child even without the consent of woman who is involved. The film portrayed a case that is different from the ancient practice of power of men over women.

Mother is constructed as an active articulate discursive figure. Woman's maternity has developed as a politics to powerfully overthrow an oppressive system like phallogentrism. By sidelining phallus woman's womb becomes politically powerful against patriarchal hegemony which results in the re-emergence of woman mother as discursive agent. One could argue that men have a powerful envy towards female reproductive capacity ; which psychoanalyst Karen Horney called as "womb envy."

Here Meera, the protagonist by opting for motherhood became powerful through her womb. She becomes pregnant with technological insemination that rejects the presence of a physical phallus. Woman mother re-emerged as an active and articulate discursive figure by rendering the patriarchal man/father silent, passive and inarticulate. This results in female centred and maternal oriented discourse which results in a diad family structure. Meera's decision to become a mother makes her empowered and strong in her life as woman and as mother.

The entire study focuses on the way how reproduction becomes the tool for the woman to strive against the hegemonies of patriarchy. It deals with the concept of artificial insemination. The film exposes the ways how maternity is the real strength and identity of a woman. It shows maternity as a newly discovered force of resistance that enables women to fight back the political strategic games of colonial model of domination as there is lack of physical presence of man. Technology replaces man in the reproductive function of women. This calls for a rethinking of female reproductive sexuality. Woman-mother reclaims territorial right of her body and exclusive right of her children.

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