

Mythological Journey of Performatives: An Act of Masculine-Feminine Traits in Meera's Verse

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Men and women live on a stage on which they act out their assigned roles, equal in importance and significance. The play cannot go on without both kinds of performers. Neither of them contributes more or less to the whole; neither is marginal nor dispensable. However, the stage is conceived, painted, and defined by men; men have written the play, directed the show, and interpreted the meanings of action. They have assigned themselves the most interesting and heroic parts, while giving women the supporting roles (Lerner 217).

Since time immemorial, every individual is composed of two elements, i.e. masculine and feminine. The human mind performs through the combination of masculine and feminine traits, integrating both elements. Moreover, *Samkhya* philosophy introduces concepts such as *purusha* and *prakriti*, where *purusha* is the eternal, conscious self, and *prakriti* is the unconscious, fundamental nature of a person. This paper examines the mythological facets of Krishna and his ardent follower, Meera. Till now, Meera's verses have been written from feminist perspectives and with *bhakti bhav*, but the current paper reveals the *purush prakriti* notion and the social performatives of gender.

The concepts of *purush* and *prakriti* explore the relationship between the soul, consciousness, and the material world, which form the foundation of dualistic philosophy. The analogy of a clockmaker and a clock illustrates this relationship well: the clockmaker represents divine consciousness, while the clock symbolises the physical universe. *Prakriti* is material, whereas *purush* refers to the individual soul (*Shrimad Bhagavat Gita* 13.307.19). It is essential to recognise that both material

nature and living beings have no beginning. All changes and characteristics of nature emerge from this material essence (13.308.20). Additionally, *purush* arises from *Prakriti*, along with the three *gunas* (qualities), and eventually faces death as a result of its actions—both good and bad.

Prakriti is defined as a pure energy that believes in creation. It is the force through which creation is manifested. The term *prakriti* (प्रकृति) is derived from the Sanskrit syllable 'प्र', which represents the feminine element inherent in all living beings. At the same time, 'कृति' (Kriti) signifies creation (as mentioned in Shrimad Devi Bhagavat Puran 9.290.11). Each letter has its significant meaning, reflecting the three qualities, or *gunas*: *Rajo*, *Tamo*, and *Satva*. Therefore, *prakriti* embodies all these *gunas* and is referred to as *Trigunatmika*, with its primary role centred on the process of creation. *Prakriti* is all-powerful, eternal, and supreme; it is said that the divine was divided into two aspects, with 'purush' representing the right side and 'prakriti' on the left. It is the reason behind the belief of yogis, who view all individuals equally, regardless of gender.

In the *Padma Purana*, Radha is depicted as the primordial energy (*Adi shakti*), which is the source of all creation, including the deities Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesha (Shiva). She embodies Krishna's blissful essence and is known as *rasovaisah*. It signifies the creation of the universe, which has the sweetness of pleasure, or the lord is sweet who brings joy and felicity. Radha is also referred to by names such as *Aahladini*, *Shivashakti*, *Paraaparakriti*, *Lakshmi*, and *Mahamaya*, highlighting her role as the divine energy that underpins the universe. As a result, she is often considered synonymous with the Goddesses *Saraswati*, *Durga*, *Kali*, and *Parvati*. According to Ramanuja, Krishna and Radha personify the duality of *Purusha* and *prakriti* in Samkhya philosophy. Her worship is an integral part of the cultic practices associated with Vallabha's *pushti sadhana*. It indicates a path towards achieving the divine grace of Shri Krishna.

Folk literature conveys the traditional knowledge and beliefs of cultures that lack written evidence. It is transmitted by word of mouth and consists of prose and verse narratives, poems and songs, myths, dramas, rituals, proverbs, riddles, and other forms of oral literature. Nearly all known peoples, past or present, have produced it. Folk literature is like a nurturing source, fostering and nurturing written literature. It is the root, the solid foundation, aiding written literature's strong and sustainable development. Written literature is inherited, repeated, and developed from the essence of folk literature. The connection between folk and written literature is dynamic, deeply intertwined, and mutually influential. Written literature greatly relies on the rich traditions of folk literature for its development, while folk literature is enhanced, nurtured, and preserved by the existence of written forms.

Folk literature emerges from the vernacular dialects of every region of India. In the Western part of India, Rajasthan's Beawar district got a promising opportunity to feel the soul of Radha in Meera Bai with the help of folk songs. In ancient days, Sanskrit was widely understood across India. Still, it was largely limited to the upper castes' intellectual circles, much like Latin or Greek, which required formal education to grasp its meanings. In contrast, the *Bhakti* poets introduced a more inclusive local aesthetic movement that incorporated various regional languages. This movement followed a discernible pattern. Among India's regional languages, the Rajasthani language, which has numerous dialects such as Marwari, Mewari, Malvi, and Hadoti, is spoken in various parts of Rajasthan with regional variations. However, it is understood by most of the state's population. It was discovered at the beginning of the 18th century that Meera Bai wrote in the Rajasthani language (Hole 301-302). Her verses are believed to have been found 150 years after her death. It is believed that Meera Bai undertook pilgrimages to the cities of Dwarka and Vrindavan in the last years of her life.

The earliest expressions of the northern Indian cults of Krishna and Radha emerged in the vernacular languages, making a significant contribution to the evolution of later Indian literature. Notable among these are the 12th-century poems by Jaydev, titled the *Gitagovinda* (The

Cowherd's Song). Additionally, around 1400, the poet Vidyapati composed a collection of devotional love poems in Maithili (part of eastern Hindi from Bihar) that greatly influenced the Radha-Krishna movement in Bengal.

The Radha-Krishna cult reached its peak through the teachings of Hindu mystics such as Chaitanya in Bengal and Vallabhacharya in Mathura, emphasising *bhakti*, or personal devotion to a deity. This sentiment can also be traced back to the Tamil Alvars, mystics who created passionate hymns to Vishnu between the 7th and 10th centuries, and later, the *bhakti* movement permeated all aspects of Indian intellectual and religious life.

The relationship between the devotee and the divine elucidates a *gopibhava* towards Lord Krishna. Likewise, Meera's devotional verses depict her *bhakti* to Krishna, whom she imagines as her beloved and divine lord. Her songs represent the longing of the individual soul, or *jivatman*, to unite with the Universe, or *Brahman*. Her profound prayers echo through the ages, remaining eternal and powerful. Meera's songs are called *chhand*; it is a term that defines spiritual songs.

Once, Meera Bai travelled from Dwarka to Vrindavan with a group of hermits, including some women. When they arrived in the evening, they decided it was safer to stop for the night. Meera then proposed that they visit the nearby ashram of Jeev Goswami Ji. Upon reaching the *ashram*, they were met by Goswami Ji's servant, who informed them that Goswami Ji did not meet with women. He told her he would not allow a woman's presence anywhere near him. In response, Meera took the initiative to write a letter and entrusted it to the servant. The servant faithfully delivered the letter to Goswami Ji. Upon reading Meera's deep and heartfelt message, Goswami Ji hurried outside to seek her forgiveness. In her letter, she expressed :

मैंने अब तक यही सुना था कि वृंदावन में पुरुष एकमात्र रसिक शेखर वृजन्दन श्री कृष्ण ही हैं। अन्य तो जीव मात्र प्रकृति स्वरूप नारी हैं। आज मेरी भूल को सुधार के उन्होंने बड़ी कृपा की। ज्ञात हुआ कि वृंदावन में दूसरा पुरुष भी अवतीर्ण हुआ है। (Ranavat 310)

Meera expresses, “I have heard that there is only one man in Vrindavan, and that is Shri Krishna. All others worship Shri Krishna with the loving sentiments of the *Gopis* (female cowherds). I am not sure if any other man exists in Vrindavan apart from Krishna” (Ranavat 310). In response, Jeev Goswami ji emphasises the importance of forbearance, stating that understanding is incomplete unless one’s actions reflect the truth. His heartfelt apology towards Meera depicts a belief that there is only one Purush, which is Lord Krishna, and the rest of the world carries his imprints through *the purush* and *prakriti forms*. Similarly, *the Ardhanarishwar* form of Lord Shiva conveys that the distinction between men and women stems from ignorance. Discriminating between the two is an insult to God. It is crucial to eliminate biases between genders and foster equal respect for all individuals to achieve a divine state.

Mysticism offers a profound experience for those who seek it, recognised by a deep connection with the supernatural and communion with the divine. This journey is often accompanied by feelings of bliss and ecstasy that devotees attribute to their closeness with God. One attains a mystical experience that typically involves the practice of moral virtues and a commitment to detaching oneself from worldly concerns.

The river seeks to merge with the Ocean, illustrating its path in a beautiful way. The river does not flow for its own sake nor seek to claim credit; instead, it persistently navigates obstacles to reach its ultimate destination: the Ocean. Similarly, seekers of God face significant challenges, refraining from immoral actions, cultivating virtues such as purity and contentment, and engaging in compassionate and charitable activities to develop the discipline of both body and mind.

Renunciation and relinquishment are two crucial aspects of the mystic’s path. Renunciation involves letting go of desire-driven actions, while relinquishment means releasing attachment to the outcomes of those actions (Mehta 17). Devotion to God is a common theme among many saints and mystics. Mira Bai, a revered Hindu mystic and poet from sixteenth-century Rajasthan, exemplified this devotion. Despite being

married, she believed that earthly desires lead nowhere, while a passion for the divine draws one closer to God. Mira Bai is a significant figure in the realm of Bhakti literature, with her life and poetry intricately joined to the religious movement that flourished in India during medieval times.

In his exquisite research on Meera, Prof. Madhav Hada discusses the masculine-feminine attribution of a person in terms of separation. Meera's 16th-century bhakti poetry expresses her profound spiritual love for Krishna. How should we interpret literature that suggests femininity is a normal existence of some disease resulting from the absence of masculinity? (Hawley 133). It reveals that femininity is always taken as a subordinate in contrast to masculinity. He compares it with terms like *maya* and *prakriti*. Meera's verses are not only about love and separation; rather, they transgress both realms and reach towards spirituality. It is not about the fragility of a woman; it is about an independent woman who wants to live her life on her terms. Hawley contradicts the generalisation that women are weaker and incomplete than men. It may be the reason behind the belief that women are naturally inclined towards *bhakti*. If it is assumed true, then the percentage of female saints must be greater than that of male saints, but this is not the case because male saints are larger in number than female saints. Meera uses the local language, incorporating proverbs, which is entirely distinct from that of her contemporaries (Hada 14). Such idioms and language are only used in Mewar-Marwar of Rajasthan. One of her famous verses is:

पग घूँघरू बाँध मीरा नाची रे
 पग घूँघरू बाँध मीरा नाची रे।
 मैं तो मेरे नारायण की आप ही हो गई दासी रे।
 लोग कहै मीरा भई बावरी न्यात कहै कुलना सीरे।।
 विष का प्याला राणाजी भेज्या पीवत मीरा हॉ सीरे।
 'मीरा' के प्रभु गिरिधर नागर सहज मिले अविनासीरे

Meera dances with the help of her *ghungharoos* and dedicates herself to Krishna's devotion. She has become the other half of her lord and is an ardent follower of Shri Hari Krishna. Due to her *bhakti bhav*, people label her a maniac, and her family disowned her. Her father-in-law, Rana Ji, sent her poison in the form of a snake in a basket of flowers. However, the poison, too, could not harm Meera because Krishna had turned it into nectar. She only considered Krishna to be an embodiment of the true *purush*. Thus, the form of *prakriti* in Meera assimilates herself in the *purush* trait of Krishna.

Thus, the cross-cultural assimilation emerges as a conflation of maleness and femaleness through the folk writings of Meera. Her mysticism and utilisation of regional dialect bring the *bhakti bhav* of an ardent follower of Shri Krishana in an exquisite way to represent the cultural facets of Rajasthan. The oneness of an individual displays the *purushprakriti* elements closer to each other. It is about the amalgamation of a person's protectiveness and tenderness that makes them complete. The masculine and feminine take charge of both gender performances to create stability in heteronormative society. An attempt to endeavour to balance by focusing on cisnormative ideas is made to bestow a new perspective on Indian writings in English.

Works Cited

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