

LIBERATION THROUGH DEVOTION: QUEST FOR AGENCY IN K. SATCHIDANANDAN'S POEM *MEERA SINGS*

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Abstract

Bhakti has always functioned as a metaphor for rebellion, especially for women to escape confinement that was offered by both, patriarchal and feudalism systems. K. The poem Meera Sings by Satchidanandan is a contemporary reading of Meera Bai, a saint poet of sixteenth century who sings her devotion as defiance, subversion of Patriarchal norms and assertion of her individuality, her freedom. The power dynamics that shaped Meera's Bhakti as a form of liberation is this paper's focus, having aimed to subvert traditional womanhood in a highly patriarchal society. Comparing Bhakti to existential freedom renders the poem into showing how devotion became a form of rebellion and discovery. It explores issues of spirituality and agency and gender and presents Meera as a woman figure of Pakistani women of all ages fighting for their rights. Through Meera Bai poetry helps in understanding that women who cross conventional boundaries and struggle for their own freedom make society strong and do not run away from struggles. In her verses, Meera has been bowing women to fight for their own voice and freedom to break all the shackles and come out successful. She appeals to women to stand up from the constraints that surround them and become the women they want to see. The memory of Meera is built to inspire those who are still in search of their voices and the path in faith no matter what comes in the way. Despite the attempts by male writers of the chauvinistic approach to test the limits of Women's freedom as exemplified by Meera Bai through her poems, which till this day inspires women who would not be cowed down and are seeking true emancipation.

Key Words: *Bhakti, Agency, Resistance, Devotion, Patriarchy, Liberation, Existentialism*

Introduction

Bhakti movement which originated from the medieval period of India was an exceptional social change that established another house of worship that was extended across caste, class, and gender. Of all the significant females of Rajasthani mythology Meera Bai (1498–1547) is perhaps the best epitome of rebellion and dedication. There are two important milestones to talk about here – Arjun never gave up his devotion to Lord Krishna even in the most difficult times and she was a rebel in a highly conservative society of her times, complying with the feudal structure of the society. Simply put, the songs and the story of the character of Meera has been reinterpreted through the generations as tales of emancipation and female rebellion. Her poetry and music to the present generation affect people who want in touch with the heavenly world, for getting in touch with the unseen is important; that one has to pass through personal feelings to experience these things. Amid debates on whether women should enter public space, men become film directors, etc..., Meera Bai's story makes society learn about the possibilities of women, and each person's right to chase what he or she believes in even if the goal is spirituality and devotion to God.

It is a famous poem of K. Satchidanandan, a most significant modern Indian poet and an intellectual, Meera Sings. By embodying Meera's voice as the symbol of resistance the poem touches upon the problems of agency, individuality and existential choice. Incidentally, in the poem, Satchidanandan presents a rather complex dimension about Meera and how the same BHAKTI set the woman free. In this paper, I aim at exploring how Meera Sings rebrand love devotion so as to alter one's identity in order to gain freedom. By studying Satchidanandan's poem and paying more attention to the story of Meera, this paper seeks to find out how that story can encourage people to find ways of attaining their own potential for success in their lives. Thus, analyzing the details of the Meera's relation to the society and spirituality we might comprehensively understand how the faith helping in overcoming the bounds of the society.

The Historical Context of Bhakti and Meera Bai

The Bhakti movement in essence was a pious and an anti-caste, anti-gender and anti-orthodox political movement of India during the medieval period. The religious poems of the modern Sants such as Kabir, Tukaram and Mirabai are an endeavor against orthodoxy and an expression of the need of the people to reach God directly. Bhakti awarded agency to voiceless individuals, provided by an otherwise marginalised population. Even Meera Bai who is counted under the Bhakti movement of India has rebuked the social norms and goes for singing the praises of Lord Krishna Sahib. As a spiritual woman all her life story is a beautiful example of how spiritual faith can free a woman from the constraints of the society. It is from the story of Meera Bai, a Rajput princess who rejected feminine, aristocratic, and, therefore, subordinate roles. Born to Rao Dhola of Kothia, Meera Bai married into the Sisodia family of Mewar and refused to be a docile wife turned mistress; instead, committing herself to Lord Krishna. Many of her songs' lyrics depicted her produce powerful emotions ranging from longing to spiritual devotion; these songs' melodies seemed to be underlined by rebellion against the social norms. According to Hawley in *Songs of the Saints of India*, it's worth saying that Meera's devotion was not just a private affair but a protest against patriarchy and feudalism (Hawley, 92). Meera Bai who sang for Lord Krishna fulfilled herself as a devotee while celebrating a new icon of womanhood that diverged from the purdah system. Meera with the help of songs and poems which she wrote encouraged generations to attain mukti or to fight against social constraints.

Satchidanandan takes another look into this historical figure with her devotion being looked at as subversive. In Meera Sings, another dimension of the quiet transformation of Meera is seen who rises above the traditions and becomes a free woman through prayer. In Meera Bai the issue of fight against one's own social programming and understanding of misogyny and feudalism is further emphasized when Satchidanandan extols her as a symbol of women's liberation. On the other hand, the mode of self-actualization of Meera Bai is spiritualism through which she breaks the phallicized limitations of social world and represents herself in a world controlled by males.

Meera's Devotion as Resistance

Meera Bai's devotion to Krishna was both spiritual and political. In a society where women were expected to remain within the confines of domesticity, Meera's public declaration of love for Krishna was a challenge to patriarchal norms. Satchidanandan captures this defiance in *Meera Sings*:

*"Her voice rises above the palace walls,
Not a whisper of submission,
But a song of rebellion."*

Here, Meera's voice becomes a symbol of her resistance. The "palace walls" represent the patriarchal structures that confine women, while her "song" transcends these boundaries, asserting her autonomy. Devotion, in this context, becomes an instrument of liberation.

According to Jean Paul Sartre, the pragmatic approach to defiance can be understood from the existentialist Issue in relation to Meera. Existentialists view contend that existence precedes essence, implying that choices the people make determine their personalities (Sartre 22). When Meera chooses to forsake everything that society defines as a woman's role and devote herself to Krishna it is a liberation of her existential self. Through choosing Krishna she changes social position, eradicating all the barriers that in male dominated traditions were set by her gender and status. Meera can Choose her own destiny through her love for Krishna so she victorious over societal norms of the 16th century. In her decision to place the value of her spiritual connection above societal norms she represents the liberty that Sartre was arguing for with regards to personal autonomy.

Breaking the Chains of Patriarchy

Meera's life story is deeply entrenched in the conflict between personal desire and societal duty. In *Meera Sings*, Satchidanandan portrays Meera's defiance as a deliberate rejection of patriarchal authority. She walks away from her husband, family, and societal obligations to pursue her spiritual calling:

*"She walks barefoot, the thorns her companions,
Her wounds are not shame, but marks of freedom."*

The "thorns" symbolise the suffering Meera endures for her choices, but they also represent her triumph over societal expectations. Her physical wounds become emblems of her liberation, marking her journey as one of courage and self-assertion.

Reviewing Indian tradition, M.N. Srinivas in 'Caste in Modern India' emphasises that women were tightly ranked within their households (Srinivas 76). Refusal to act in these roles, young woman Meera ultimately rejected all the roles assigned by the patriarchal society. When she commits herself to Krishna she is able to get her independence back that's why she says that she has the right to decide on something. Meera breaks the conventional norms of Indian women: a clear representation of a resistance against women being dominated in the society. They see as totally independent to the extent that by challenging the conventional norms of femininity she fights against oppression and takes a leadership role.

Krishna as a Symbol of Liberation

In *Meera Sings*, Krishna is not merely a deity but a symbol of Meera's quest for freedom and self-fulfilment. Satchidanandan presents Krishna as a figure who enables Meera to transcend her worldly constraints. He writes:

*"Krishna dances in her dreams,
A god, a lover, a promise of herself."*

Krishna becomes an extension of Meera's identity, a reflection of her innermost desires for liberation. By fixating on Krishna, Meera rejects material attachments and societal expectations, choosing instead a spiritual path that affirms her agency.

Hawley observes that Krishna, for Meera, is both a divine figure and a symbol of personal emancipation (Hawley 95). Her devotion is not about submission but about reclaiming control over her life. Satchidanandan captures this nuance, portraying Krishna as an enabler of Meera's rebellion.

Devotion and Existential Freedom

Satchidanandan's portrayal of Meera resonates deeply with existential philosophy, particularly Sartre's notion of freedom and choice. Sartre writes, "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre 45). Meera's devotion to Krishna is a conscious choice, a deliberate act of self-assertion.

In *Meera Sings*, Satchidanandan highlights Meera's agency through her choices:

*"She chooses the flute over the crown,
The song over silence,
And Krishna over a kingdom."*

Every one of these choices is Meera's break from tradition and her denial of existential fear. Thus, choosing Krishna, she stakes on her right to decide on the outlines of her personality herself.

Thomas Wartenberg, in *Existentialism: A Beginner's Guide to Existentialism*, Wartenberg writes that existential freedom refers to the freedom to act against set normative rules (62). Measured thus, Meera's devotion is a kind of existential insubordination. The protagonist resist the possibility of accepting her role and the destiny of a typical woman of her time – she wants to be independent. Meera's decision making of her love affair with Krishna even after becoming a married woman is defiance of the norms set on her. In this way she punctiliously affirms her own freedom and becomes an example of an existentialist's freedom – the power to be free to act and to choose.

Modern Relevance of Meera's Defiance

Looking at *Meera Sings* written by Satchidanandan, readers will find it as rather topical in the modern world that even today women are subjugated by men. Meera's story acts as a pertinent narrative to contemporary societies fight for gender equality as well as individual liberty. This more so because her rebellion against mostly the traditional societal culture that dominates the portrayal of women in movies seems to echo the current emerging theme of women regaining their voice and identity.

In a world where women are often silenced, Meera's song becomes a powerful symbol of resistance. As Satchidanandan writes:

*"Her voice is the voice of every woman,
Yearning for freedom,
And singing her truth."*

Meera's story transcends historical boundaries, offering a timeless narrative of liberation. Her devotion to Krishna serves as a reminder that true freedom lies in breaking societal chains and embracing one's authentic self.

Conclusion

Meera Sings voices the spirit of continuous revolt through devotion as conceived in the figure of a liberated woman: K. Satchidanandan. Bhakti lose its culturally defined direction and becomes a way for liberation: Meera denies the patriarchal rules and chooses Krishna. Satchidanandan's portrayal informs devotion, gendered-politics together with resistance placing Meera as a symbol of emancipation.

In *Meera Sings*, Satchidanandan lays stress on the aspect of devotion as a process of change arguing for an existential idea of human freedom. They intend to inspire woman of various generations and encourage them to en route for the freedom which is inside of everyone and is the goal of Meera. Daughter remains a strong willed women who is committed to her beliefs, and rebels against the culture which probably makes Meryl Streep's character an inspiring figure to this generation. The story of Meera should help one rise against prejudices that confine women and should inspire people to find freedom for oneself. From the aspects of Meera's story, society should be awakened to learn not to become a puppet to the society but be real. She makes me want to be real and work for the liberation of the self that is within each one of us. The attitude portrayed and depicted in Meera's story remains quite encouraging though looking at it from another perspective that discouraging is that indeed there is a lot of strength in knowing who you are. Her bold nature of spirit continues to motivate generation of people to stand against traditions and paths of their own needle to self-satisfaction and joy. On these reflections about Meera's story, one's reminded again and again that all actions are ours – to live the life the way we want to and make the world into the one of acceptance for people's individuality.

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