

**Food and Sexuality:  
A Critical Analysis of Leena Manimekalai's Poetry**

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Food and sexuality are associated with various ways in history. Generally, women's body are described with the imageries such as animals, birds, flower, and even food. Poetry and food are related in few aspects. It is common to be noted that men describes women's body with several similes. It is to be considered that women's eyes are compared with fish, her breasts are compared to apple and it is erotic to be described. Women's body gets affected on all sides by various forms. This paper sets forth about how women's body is compared to food and about the hungry and thirst of men. Hunger or thirst not only exist in the means of food, it is also connected with the lust of men towards women.

Poetry is always about discovering a new language and meanings. Food is also used as a motif or a repetitive symbol in poetry. Leena Manimekalai, an independent film maker, poet, and an actor compares the body of women with the elements of food in her poetry. Her works include five poetry anthologies, films in different genres like documentary, fiction, and poem films. She has awarded in many international and national film festivals. Through her poetry 'My Mirror is the Door' visualizes the age of Sangam, medieval and modern periods and she traces out her as a Modern Tamil poet.

Leena Manimekalai has several opinions and open up everything freely in all those aspects. It can be quoted by her statement: "Obviously my poetry is dangerous to religious and ideologically fanatic minds. Language is my first enemy; its norms, design and usage are controlled by the dominant patriarchy" (Samposonia way). she is frank about her own sexuality and similarly she views the world too. Manimekalai's poem was opposed and condemned by common people but she was keen to portray about the sufferings and pain of women. As a activist, she has represented female physic and sexuality as a tool for feminist resistance. She gives voice to voiceless. She violates the social norms of chastity and sexual fidelity.

Leena as a powerful and rebellious writer in her poem "October Poems" laments about the women's body.

...You say that my child has mistaken  
honey for milk  
You name it different everyday  
to impress me  
May flower chithirakkani thorn apple screw pine  
Hibiscus lily egg fruit what not... (14-19)

She explores in these lines of how women's body is compared to food. Men do not consider the inner emotions of women. They seek women merely for physical pleasure. Leena here confronts that woman as she was feeding her baby her husband mistakes honey for milk. He impresses everyday by naming it with different names. Food is used as an imagery to describe women's body. By critically analysing the poem of Leena Manimekalai she used the word 'egg fruit' as a vaginal symbol and 'apple' and 'screw pine' is used as an imagery for breast.

Her poem "Menstrual Flower" celebrates the creative and productive aspects of womanhood.

...I give myself to satiate the hunger of eagles  
The blood oozing from the flesh  
Makes the forests go mad... (7-9)

'Menstruation' is generally considered as a sign of impurity. Women are not allowed in the temple in the name of religion and myth of impurity, but a woman should give herself to satisfy men. 'Sate the hunger of eagles' symbolizes the sexual pleasure of men and considers women as a prey or a food to satisfy their hunger. Menstruation is not a painful experience for the poet but it is an obstacle for her passion and emotion. Woman's body is considered as a victim by which, she does not have the right to know about her own self (body).

The poem "What do you Want?" also deals with the men's attitude towards women.

Finally when I met him  
He happened to be a fish  
In my ocean he swam  
with millions of scales  
Never once did he  
get caught in my fingers  
Whenever he plays the brown blue serpent gourd  
And convulsions die down

He drinks my spirit  
In his thirst  
I kept drowning  
whenever I tried to grab  
His light-ball face... (1-13)

Leena considers men as a fish by which he swam into women who is considered as a ocean in order to have physical pleasure. 'He drinks my spirit/In his thirst/I kept drowning'-thirst is not only the thirst which generally we have, here Leena considers thirst as a vaulting ambition towards women. The thirst of men on women is as a painful experience. Thirst symbolizes the desire and sexual thirst of men. The poet considers how women toil hard in the male- dominated society. Leena uses powerful images such as hunger and thirst to express how men see women with their naked thought.

The most exotic poem of Leena, "Me Him" brings out the element of food such as salt and coca cola.

...wrestled him down  
And asked him to lick the salt,  
He mumbled coca cola  
Hugged him till he swooned... (24-27)

'Salt' symbolizes the saltiness present in the flesh and represent the sexuality. This representation of salt and coca cola appears as the symbol of sexuality. Food is thus, interpreted as a sexual object and appears to be erotic.

"Chichilli" is a poem which celebrates female sexuality.

...I will now gulp down my hunger  
And free the fish to  
Frolic in the boat... (14-16)

Here the poet compares herself to be a kingfisher and her body is multi-colored like a bird. With her multihued body she spreads her wings by which she catches the fish. 'Fish' here is considered to be men. The poet fulfills her hunger. Generally, women are considered to be the victims but here in this poem it is reversal. The object becomes the subject, the prey becomes the predator. Women is considered as the site of power and authority.

Leena Manimekalai in the context of controversies and criticisms, approached with her focus with strength. Her writings marginal the figure woman/female-body. As a poet she used several imageries with reference to food.

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