

FEMALE DEATH METAL VOCALISTS IN GENDER BATTLES AND ASSERTING IDENTITY: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE

Abstract

The research paper deals with the topic of the asserting identity of the female death metal vocalists through the lens of gender studies. It will also analyze the cultural contexts of the metal genre where the sex is viewed as a medium to communicate the purpose of the music. However, some lyrics are responsible for “reproducing and upholding hegemonic, sexist notions of femininity, and serving to undermine and disempower women.” (Oware 787) These thoughts have been put forward by a lot of critics in their studies regarding the context of the position of women in the culture. The research paper will take into account several criticisms and discussions done in the popular culture about the issue and compare it with the modern day female death metal vocalists to convey the message of subversion in them.

The research paper will take into account various extreme/death metal songs written and sung by female vocalists to be analyzed by a feminist literary criticism. The female bands incorporated would be In This Moment, Stitched Up Heart, Once Human etc. As is true for any male dominated genre, language from the perspective of a female writer is “a male instrument fashioned for male purposes.” (Barry 121). The question now arises as to how a feminine voice will assert her space in a language that is inherently against her sex?

The paper strives to follow to re-reading of the songs of these female vocalists. Since they do borrow their ideology from the genre, inherently masculine (almost misogynistic) in nature to subvert and create something of their own. The paper will also try to prove that women vocalists also try to break the taboos that exist in the society each taking their unique take on the matter. The paper will examine the way they also break the stereotypes placed on them by the society on various issues such as social, religious, cultural and political

Introduction

Using a symbolic interactionism framework, this literature review takes four death/extreme metal songs written and sung by female vocalists to point out the language used by them is to subvert the patriarchy and societal norms placed on women. For the purpose four songs by the female vocalists Butcher Babies have been selected. These include “Lilith”, “Burn the straw man”, “Controller” and “They’re coming to take me away”. The review takes the secondary sources of the above songs to support its argument. It will also focus on the symbolism of femininity of their visual representation of the same. At last, the review will be focusing on reading in-between the lines to represent by the sources of the subculture of death metal as a whole from a female perspective.

Butcher Babies is a heavy metal band with two lead female vocalists- Heidi Shepherd and Carla Harvey. Their band guitarist is Henry Flurry, bassist Jason Klien and Chase Brickenden plays the drums.

The name opted by the band is interesting in terms of its layered meaning. It is like an oxymoron if you really think in the term of babies being butchers. Butchering is a bloody task that requires a certain amount of heartlessness to kill ad babies being symbolic of innocence, aren’t ideal picks for the gruesome job. And if it has to be taken as a verb, the meaning is pretty sinister again. Killing babies is a cruel and unacceptable activity, let alone butchering them.

However, Shepherd in an interview states that the former interpretation of the named was what they opted themselves to represent. They wanted to break the concept of associating symbolism in a stereotypical manner since the concept of innocence is associated with women and children.

As stated, their name challenges the idea of association of women with being angelic and needing to be preserved and protected. Here are two Babies (also could be used as a loving or a derogatory term, implication is subject to change in relation to the context, speaker and tone) perfectly capable of churning out violence and mind-twisting ideas. The selected four songs are an amazing example of their creativity.

The review is to summarize the purpose of writing the song and their deeper meaning of rebellion. The songs itself have an entity of its own, serving as an ideological mouthpiece of a small, marginalized group of society (female metalheads and musicians). These four songs of the band have been chosen because they are multilayered in their topics and themes. It will perpetuate the use of literary sources that would also be extended and used later.

Literature review

1. ProjectMetalMusic.com and SoundBoardReviews.com

ProjectMetalMusic.com, has found the overall album pretty recommendable. The site states huge contrasts in the four songs but they are all good on the terms if their individual entities. Where the site finds the Controller “hauntingly beautiful”, they’re coming to take me away is more of a “tongue-in-cheek affair” (unknown ProjectMetalMusic.com) for it. The SoundBoardReviews.com is also pretty enthusiastic about the four songs mentioned in the literary review. The site rated the overall album at eight out of ten. In terms of ratings, the paper would agree with both of them. Even in the midst of bad reviews that were found, Butcher Babies had been successful overall. They were able to convey the ideas they were trying to put through.

Their songs were received as dark, horrific, gory yet, eye-opening, female-centric and made the critics ponder. This is a recommendable feat to achieve by the ladies.

2. Blabbermouth.com

Noting onto their personal choice for the songs, the band has put forward a lot of interesting ideas. For example, “Lilith” “Historically, Lilith has become demonized as a representation of promiscuity and disobedience. We, however, see her as a positive figure. A symbol of autonomy, sexual equality, and full control over your own destiny.” (Shepherd, Blabbermouth.com). “Lilith” is the supreme representation of the left hand path woman: independent, having discarded the patriarchal yoke, and not afraid to use tools available to her, including her sexuality, to gain the most out of existence.” (Blabbermouth Blabbermouth.com)

3. LetLyrics.com

“Controller” is talked by LetLyrics from the perspective of a woman who is locked in a toxic relationship struggle. Her significant other plays mind games with her to keep her in his shackles. However, the tone of the song drips with sarcasm as she states that “You think you have control” (878 letlyrics.com) and further proclaims that no one has control over anyone.

4. Genius.com

The idea takes a bigger step in Burn the straw man that portrays the idea of governmental control. It is a “system” (unknown genius.com) versus the individual. When she comments that “they’re watching me, they’re watching you” (unknown genius.com), the sinister depiction will make you question reality.

5. DankLyrics.com

Reality is a concept that the band plays with. They twist and turn their words to create a parallel reality which isn’t a happy place, the one where you do not want to linger. The last song is a cover of the 90s band Napoleon XVII’s “They’re coming to take me away”. The song is from the perspective of a heartbroken lover who is driven insane and is imagining his/her future in the mental asylum. Disturbing as the original version was, the band adds lyrics of their own telling that he’ll/she’ll be going “To the loony bin with all you can eat prosection drugs like Thorazine, and lithium, and electric shock and insulin” (unknown DarkLyrics.com). It is interesting to note that they have covered a popular rock/country song, turned it into death metal and almost made the song their own, with a morbid twist

6. HmMagazine.com

Almost every metal band is prone to using shock factor in their imagery, depiction and lyrics. Butcher Babies usually stick to words to use in the place than gory imagery. However, they do use other methods too such as performing with bare minimum clothing and being topless except for tapes on their nipples. Butcher babies work on the idea of subverting the norms and creating a new meaning out of it. Their creativity lies in the fact that in the process of interpretation, they give their listeners fresh content to ponder upon. In general the genre of metal stands for being a subculture that has doesn’t conform to the rules of the society. It is all about finding and venting your animalistic instincts. Thus, the Butcher Babies go about in the style of subverting the norms. They aren’t very open about it. It only is visible on a careful scrutiny.

7. Rogers, Anna Sheree. “Women in Hypermasculine Environments: An Analysis of Gender Dynamics in the Heavy Metal Subculture.”

A lot of questions arise as to why they aren’t very open with their ‘feminist’ theme of the songs, assuming that they are feminist (a much disputed idea). It is claimed by a lot of critics that the choice is “that are of a personal nature”. However, most critics guess that since the metal genre is inherently regarded as a masculine genre. This is to the point that various critics in the recent times highlighted the misogynistic lyrics that existed. Other than that, the lyrics used by the male metal bands or artists are violent towards women. The most prominent example would be Daddy, Pleasure slave etc. The argument had seared that metal was supposed to stand out in its violence and its general base of non-conformity with the society. However, by treating women with disregard and portrayal of them as sex slave was first, not politically, socially or culturally right but also by this process the community was actually conforming to the strata of the society. They were projecting the extremity of the actual society, maybe making it fatal and more dangerous. Thus the female metal bands including Butcher Babies can be seen as the feminist personification of the subculture. The striking thing about Butcher Babies is that they are in-the-face about their disregard to patriarchy efficiently reflected in their lyrics.

8. Sarah Kitteringham (Extreme Conditions Demand Extreme Responses: The Treatment of Women in Black Metal, Death Metal, Doom Metal, and Grindcore)

A part of shock factor and the subculture in general, the band does not deter from being gory to downright blood bathed in their depictions. They freely talk about the violent fantasies they have. To painting towns red (Lilith) and being crazy (Controller), they talk about how people fantasize about killing. Anarchic world and chaos forms a very huge part of their lyrics. Conforming to systems and social norms is never a thing for the metal culture. They stand to their raw passion to rebellion. Butcher Babies aren’t an exception to the rule. They call out to the system for keeping an eye on them. It is expected that we are in control of our lives and are free citizens of our respective countries. Our private life is private and nobody can have access to the doors we lock behind us. Butcher Babies bring us to a rude awakening that it isn’t always the case and no one is safe from the massive amount of governmental control that is placed on us. Hence, the rebels of the genre have anarchic ideology. They talk about how the government has been a cruel puppet and it is always best to have no government. Chaos and anarchy, it seems, according to the Butcher Babies, isn’t a bad option.

9. Sonia Vasan, ‘Den Mothers’ and ‘Band Whores’: Gender, Sex and Power in the Death Metal Scene

It is no doubt that the band and their songs belong to the horror genre. Combined with the horror, they serve you dark, brutal truths that are dripping in their lyrics. You may turn a blind eye to it, as most people choose to do or may stop and ponder upon it for a while. You might appreciate the honesty that they have to offer. There has been a huge debate about the psychology of people who cater to such sort of music. The topic is still under scrutiny. In one of the studies, “One woman claimed that she

gravitated towards metal because she ‘wanted to be able to be invincible when I needed it- when I didn’t have an outlet, when my mother made it very clear that it was not OK for me [as a woman] to be upset about something’ (Vasan 74). Thus, proving that the aggression displayed by the metal singers is an outlet for the suppressed class. The above study also proved that aware women who cannot do anything about their situation in the societal chains tend to find relieve in such music. The music of Butcher Babies has those elements as they usually speak from the perspective of the women who are suppressed. They display the ‘sinister’ women proving that women also have a dark side to them.

10. Loudwire.com and ProjectMetalMusic.com

The band is very efficient in their delivery of existential horror. They make you question the very simple everyday life of an individual. It is depressing to live with the idea but also, an essential ingredient of life. The band has a unique gift of perception making them extremely effective in internalizing any problematic view. They take up sinister causes and add their creativity and elements to make you view the world from their eyes. For example, the world and thoughts of an insane lover who knows about his fate in the song “They’re coming to take me away”. “It isn’t pretty and nobody wants to even imagine what would happen to the poor person when he/she is subjected to the medical torture but it is necessary. The world from their eyes isn’t tinted in rose colored glasses.” (Shepherd Loudwire.com). All the “Butcher Babies” want you to know is that the world may be different shades.

11. BackseatMafia.com

The musical talent of Carla and Shepherd are outstanding. The genre is based on the growling, screaming and screeching. It needs the right amount of aggression to tune with the guitar and drums (it should be synced with it more than any other genre). The talents are clearly present in both the singers. They can range over scale by the minute. “It’s a throbbing ear-splitting slice of melodic metal, the vocals a mixture of the snug and the screamed, with big riffs and bigger chorus’s the order of the day.” The best example of this from among the four songs would be “Lilith” or “Burn the straw man”. On the musical level, they have the talent that takes to be a successful metal female vocalist.

Textual Analysis

The current death metal culture has come under severe criticism for its extreme lyrics towards women. Critics have accused the genre to be “violently misogynistic” (Vasan 9). Moreover, the language used is not only derogatory but gives “limitless exploration of violent fantasy”(Rafalovich 22). In the world of death metal, women are perceived as nothing but sex slaves and pleasure objects. The degradation and violence is clearly present in the unapologetic lyrics and their visual depictions (posters, music videos etc.). Surprisingly, a lot of women engage with the music on a daily basis. “In the present day, women either front or perform in some of the mainstream music and underground music’s most celebrated hard rock and metal bands.” (unknownloudwire.com). the paper scrutinizes several songs of leading female death metal vocalists who are a part of the contemporary scenario. Their engagement with this masculine music genre has an underlying purpose. The female death metal vocalists assert their identity by subverting the existing misogynistic language present in the metal subculture.

It is important to note that the language in itself is patriarchal. It becomes especially problematic in the field of the metal subculture as it is used to describe or ascribe women (including the use of swear words). Metal has posed itself as a promoter of rape. It is often defended by the leading vocalists of the subculture claiming that the lyrics present an extreme version of the societal thought. Even then, it is clearly evident that the culture accepts women as the second sex and glorifies sexual assault, violence, rape and derogation. Even the female fandom is criticized as a ‘poser’ or ‘girlfriend’ (these words are interchangeably popular in the culture); again, a problematic association in terms of creating identity for the woman. It is in relation to a man which is a subtle refusal of accepting the woman as an individual entity. The marginalization does not end here. Female metal vocalists have a prolonged struggle within their areas to reach to the spotlight. They are treated as mere novelties by the media and the metal community. (LoyeHoustonPress)

The female has to adopt the male, patriarchal language and limitations to achieve her spot in the culture. The taken female death metal vocalists are accused of the same. They have often been subjected to sexist and racist comments about their dressing styles and lyrics. Listening to comments like “poser”, “manufactured” (unknown Blabbermouth.net) and “Bandwhores” (Vasan69), it is questioned as to why women would subject themselves to such treatment. Their lyrics have also been heavily criticized for promoting violence and gore. For example, In This Moment’s song “Blood” has lyrics that are considered to be promoting a toxic relationship in a way that the female enjoys the violent behavior of her partner:

“I love the way you dominate and violate me... I love you for never delivering me from pain.”(Churko, azlyrics.com).

These lyrics are often upheld in the context of how the metal culture has wrapped patriarchy even around the heads of women that they enjoy and glorify pain against their own sex. However, a re-reading of such similar texts (the lyrics of these songs) from the present feminist perspective reveals the subversion of the ideas that have been thought of as conforming to the generic norm.

Modern feminists explain the re-examining process as the subversion of the patriarchal language to create a language of its own. A re-reading and modern interpretation of several texts such as Jane Austen, George Eliot etc., reveals that their use of language has a remarkable difference from their male counterparts. Even in the ‘male’ language, women were successful in incorporating their feminine voices. It is all to be revealed by a careful scrutiny of their works (Klarer 123). For example, the derogatory terms and associations revolving around various words that label women or colored people, have been subverted by the major trend in the popular culture by embracing them and altering their meaning altogether. Thus, the terms such as ‘bitch’ or ‘nigger’ have changed over time to denote itself in a positive light. This development has happened overtime as the terms were internalized and subverted to create a new meaning. A similar development has been seen in the lyrics of the songs sung and the words chosen by these vocalists. (TriskaHuffingtonPost)

Thus, the modern development of creating new, positive associations from once derogatory terms has helped cultures all over the world to define and redefine their identities. The case is true even in the death metal culture. The century long

subjugation has led to female artists overtly conforming to the male dominated genre while establishing their own identity. However, the manifestation happens in a very different manner than it does in popular culture. It is also harder to read-in-between the lines because of less academic attention to the field. The female metal vocalists are also marginalized in their own genre due to the various reasons stated above. There is also a general tendency in the culture that assumes that death growl is not a woman's forte. Here is where the rebellion begins. Heidi Shephard, Maria Brinks and other female vocalists have proved the assumptions wrong.

In a culture where women are considered to be “subordinate group”, “women must limit expressions of their sexuality in order to get respect in the scene, a situation met with frustration” (Hill 4) by the female fandom and the vocalists. The rebellion on this note is evidently shown in a lot of these female vocalists as they openly talk about sexuality, their own and others. Some narrations, like “Headspin”, “Whore”, “Blood”, “Sex Metal Barbie” are very overt in their sexual undertones. “Headspin” for example, follows a description of giving vent to fantasies. The official music video follows through with a young adult man, frustrated and alone trying to fill his loneliness through virtual interaction. It is interesting to note that “Butcher Babies” took a male protagonist to visualize their words blurring the lines on terms of sexual liberation. Also, at the end, we see the mother of the man walking into his room catching him in the act. Both are too embarrassed to discuss the matter, shun it away by just avoiding the topic. This shows the general understanding of how sexuality is seen by the society in general. It is something to be embarrassed about and kept hidden.

Women are especially shamed over their sexuality. They are called derogatory names and harassed to conform to the norms. Pointed out above in the paper, is an example of how popular culture has taken in some words and attributed positive connotations to it in the fight against superiority. In This Moment's song, “Whore” is the best example of it when it comes to the death metal culture. The song talks about the women who have been pushed into prostitution and then shamed for being sexual beings and rejected by the society without their own faults. Brinks is not sorry. She puts her foot down and accepts the term and proudly proclaims that men “love me for everything they hate me for” (Churko azlyrics.com). Instead of being sorry, she is boldly laced in provocative clothing and owning the taboos and subverting it gracefully, label or no label. Metaphorically, it is a satirical commentary on how women are pre-defined by the society and then forced to maintain their identity according to it. In this sense, she talks about women, in general and the minority group of prostitutes, to be specific. Her representation is a mockery on the society for pushing women to feel guilty over their sexuality.

Metal women have never been afraid of owning their sexuality. They have always been upfront about it weather owning it in “Adranalize” where Brinks is singing about how she is “addicted to sex” and drugs or, Butcher Babies in “Lilith”. “Adranalize” also talks about addiction in general as an entire different experience. The narration does not open up a past or a present. It just talks about the experiences one gains during that phase. As long as the music is concerned, it “marks a genuine defiance that marks genre tropes. They're head bangers that sound sexy, combing feminine and masculine elements to create an instantly recognizable sound.” (Sosa Huffingtonpost.com). the song is symbolic of blurring lines between lust and intoxication, under the umbrella of addiction.

Another important feature is that women vocalists are more open in terms of the acknowledgment of the LGBTQ community. “The metal community.... Can be especially a harsh place for homosexuals, who, at any given moment, have to stomach all manner of repulsive behavior from the maladjusted” (Mathias metalinjection.net) fandom or even lyrics from the vocalists themselves. In “Sex Metal Barbie”, Brinks openly mocks the idea of homophobia. She talks about her “mother's wife” as one of the reason why she doesn't “belong to the scene”. Still, she is acceptable to the community. She draws the line of how even though she is repulsive and does not fit into any of the either clichéd metal community norms or the normal society, she is still accepted and even has a fandom. The video brings to light other problematic issues of a distorted imagery created in the society. Brinks is no Barbie doll, if she is anything even close, she is a sex metal Barbie, “a homicidal queen”, “attention fiend” etc. She knows what she has been called and instead of just ignoring it, she has taken up the name gloriously and created an identity out of the box. Traditionally, the popular culture had elicited issues of how Barbie dolls create an unrealistic body standard for women. The visual representation can also be seen as a commentary on it.

A lot of songs have been written on the based on mythological concepts and embodying them with new interpretations, mostly to fit their own version of reality. Lilith, for example, is an example of it. “Lilith” has a lot of mythological significance to it. According to mythology, Lilith is the “dark, feminine side of the Self” (Kolotov 4). She embodies various forms but all of them have been portrayed as negative. However, re-readings done by different lenses have revealed other perspectives too. In her book “The Book of Lilith”, Kolotov states that “She is a force, a quality, a power, a renegade. A free spirit. She hates to be pinned (penned) down by the word.” Butcher Babies in their song present this very same perspective of her. The Lilith Butcher Babies talk about is a left-wing woman. She isn't afraid to own up her darkness. She is sexually liberated and uses it to her own benefit. This Lilith has even a darker side to her. She is a murderer, thirsty for “youth and beauty” (unknown azlyrics). She kills men mercilessly by luring them in by her own sexual powers.

The tale does not end here. She is addressing her potential lover in the music video where she craves him only if he can “paint this town red” with her. There is no shame in her admitting that she loves the violence and bloodshed and does expect her lover to enjoy it with her. That is her idea of a match made in heaven. The video shows us a contemporary Lilith. She is going around with her desire for lust and bloodshed, slaying men and using them for her own interests until and unless she finds a man that is compatible with her on those terms. It's a rather violent and gory imagery of the demoness that she. The visualization, however extreme, works on the platform of calling out on all the people that have stereotyped women as fragile creatures that have nothing but softness inside them. Also, it overtly conforms to the metal culture of women being only sexual creatures, but calls out on those terms when she starts her song. Butcher Babies re-create a legend back outside of the structures she has been defined into.

They experiment the same build up in their song “The Huntsman”. The song strives to recreate the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” with highly sexual overtones. Butcher Babies talk about a not so innocent Red Riding Hood who is very well aware of the huntsmen and wolf out there. She initiates, or rather tricks him into “hunting” her. She has no trouble inviting him in to establishing a sexual relation, whilst wearing the cloak of innocence. It is clear from the song that she is not the Red Riding Hood that was painted for us from the childhood. Feminist re-readings also have revealed similar psychoanalytic criticism of the text. “The Little Red Riding Hood story portrays this jolting and rough transition from childhood into adulthood. In both the Perrault and Grimm’s version becoming an adult is marked by the loss of virginity, with childhood innocence equated to sexual innocence, and the maturity and knowledge of the adult equated to knowledge of sexuality and experience.” (Licht 4). The feminist reading acknowledges the character of Red Riding Hood as a child ready to take the world, “she removes her clothes willingly, conveying the idea that her loss of virginity is something that must happen and is a process she must facilitate.” (Licht 5)

Both “Lilith” and “The Huntsman” have an abundance of biblical reference as a mockery to the entire concept of religion. The Bible (the female death metal vocalists work used in the text are white and belong to the USA, where Christianity is prevalent. Hence, this choice of text is preferred) has been often viewed as a tool “for the oppression of women” (Russell 16). The metal culture has always viewed religion with hostility and vice versa. In fact, the genre is viewed with fear of being anti-religion and even as somewhat of a Satanic cult. The women of the genre have stayed away from the topic of religion. Their mockery is quite subtle but definitely there. Lilith works on the concept of Versailles, the queen of hell, owning the “Kingdom of hearts” but “feed my ego with lust”. “The Huntsman” has its mythological significance as she makes fun of religion in the sense that she knows what sin she is committing, it might make Father to “forsake” her but that won’t stop her. She needs no saving.

The female vocalists tend to be heavily self-reliant, mostly because of being heavily unappreciated and unrepresented. However, “More women are taking part in the genre. There are more female musicians in metal or so it seems.” (Rogers 52-53). However, their songs come with their struggles packed, but overshadowed by the language they implement. The struggle to reach on the spot of recognition translates into aggressive independency. The tendency is truly evident in songs like “Monster” by Stitched Up Heart or “Big Bad Wolf” by In This Moment. Both the songs talk about the not so helpless and damsels who need no one. “Monster” is an analogue where Alecia compares herself to a monster, ready to “rip you apart” if anyone tries to save her. She is self-sufficient even in a cage, confident that she’ll escape the shackles all by herself. “Big Bad wolf” is another song that works on the trope of wolves being evil (also, drawing onto the Little Red Riding Hood reference). Brinks talks about her having being vested with both the personalities of a “dirty, little pig” and “big bad wolf” using both of them to find a way of survival in the harsh world. They are both a “necessity” and she decides “which one that I want and which one when I need”. Reading in between the lines, the lyrics come across as power ballads, in the universal tone for women who have trained to suppress their natures.

Sometimes, the suppression and misogyny tends to turn the songs very much into an indirect dissing towards the male. “Black Widow” is one song that is very open about the fact that men do not have as much power as women do. The song starts with a commentary of “the male of the species is not considered to be dangerous”. As the song progresses, Brinks takes on the personality of the spider itself in the ballad of battle of sexes. She is confident that she is craved “dead or alive”. Metaphorically, she is talking about asserting power. The Metal women are prone to taking control in their songs, usually because they have been deprived of it in the long run. This nature also transcends to narratives about interpersonal relationships.

“Controller” and “Blood” both are two songs that talk about women dealing with abusive relationships. The women, however, do not take the conventional path of being motivational. They do tell you to get out of the abuse but their way of dealing with it is very unique. Brinks in “Blood” decides to murder him and Butcher Babies in “Controller” decide to carry out her revenge in making it known that he “think you’re in control” but that is not the reality. Violent by nature, they do not work on the principle of forgiveness. Their way of dealing with emotions is “like a girl” (Wald 1), just a different girl with violent plans for their lovers. The same emotions show up when they are talking about the world around them. “Burn the Straw Man” talks about the “system” and how it structurally keeps the people in the clutches of control. The description is downright detailed and scary. The metal culture worships chaos and anarchy. To the subgenre, it translates to free will. It is on the very grounds that the culture is based on, it “purports to challenge the ideas of mainstream society” (Vasan 72).

“Burn the Straw man” represents a typical anxiety of the culture regarding the society an individual lives in. The metal culture does not tend to take narratives metaphorically as literature takes to portray the “system” (unknown genius.com). Instead, they are quite free about what they feel and observe. Shepherd talks about how “they’re watching me, they’re watching you” making it obvious that nobody is outside governmental control. The comparison in itself is quite thought provoking. Various people claim that “metal music is dangerous” (Arnett 94) and view the entire culture with suspicion and fear. Amidst that thinking, you would think that if the government should really target someone, it should be the people from the culture. Shepherd comes bursting in the ideology that it isn’t true. We are all equally under the control of the government. The government only gives you an illusion of freedom. In reality, we follow and do what the system wants us to. This fear can also be seen among various literary works as critics of structuralism have pointed out that language has within itself, ideologies. Since we cannot stay out of language, we tend to be ingrained within its ideologies. Thus, we cannot escape the ideologies that perpetuate and form a structure by itself. In conclusion, nobody can be out of the structure. These structures perpetuate within themselves a cultural symbolism (Barry 42). Shepherd is right about not being able to escape the system because she herself is using one of the tools that have been handed down to her.

If you do, momentarily, manage to escape the structure, the system will work to incorporate it within itself. The best example is “They’re coming to take me away”, a cover made by Butcher Babies of the original Napoleon XVII by adding their own lyrics in the song. The narrative talks about an “insane” person who has lost a lover. It is a lament about betrayal and unfulfilled love. The break-up has disrupted the mental health of the singer as she talks about people from mental asylum coming to take her away. The song is a medical horror story. There is nothing described what she has done to deserve to be locked up but we know that

people are coming to take her away for sure where all you can “eat prescription drugs like thiorazine, and lithium, and electric shock and insulin” (Samuels azlyrics). The description will make you question the cruelty of human beings and the conformist attitude of the society. The attitude towards the world in general talks about their viewpoints in the society. Where men of the genre are talking about being Satanic, disrespectful to women and not following the rules, women have built their own narrative.

The narrative does come in terms with the androcentric male domain; it does assert the identity of the vocalists. The female vocalists have built themselves up as independent individuals capable of having their own voice inside the genre themselves. The genre works on certain tropes but saying that “Neither men nor women violate these codes” (Vasan 73) would be a farfetched concept. The paper agrees that women do have to play with the established ideas of the subculture but they give their own voice to it. The subversion could range from being inbuilt like in “Blood” to overt like “Black Widow”. The identity battle has also spilled over new aspects of song writing. In the recent era, the emergence of Castrator (that is the name of the band) has sparked controversies all over the metal community. Comprising of four female members, they are described as “Perfect Feminist Death Metal Revenge Fantasy” (Kelly Noisy.vice.com). Quite evident from the choice of their name, they usually talk about taking revenge on men by delivering violence to them. In an interview, Castrator talks about how it is time to “change the whole predator-victim scenario. We also want to empower women to realize their own strength and ability....to fight their attackers when possible. That same old story of a rapist attacking a woman in a dark alley can have a different ending.” (Castrator noisy.vice.com)

The lyrics have been criticized but that hasn't stopped the fact from being noticed that the songs are all about giving the men of metal a taste of their own medicine. “We are doing what the guys do but from a female point of view, and in doing so making a critique of the whole genre.” (Castrator noisy.vice.com) Needless to say, they are quite vocal of their resentment of the general treatment of women. It is to be kept in mind that they are an emerging band and truly new. However, the ideas they perpetuate are in alignment to the established bands of Butcher Babies, In This Moment or Once Human (who have been quite established in the genre). The idea of establishing a feminine identity had always been present in the female death metal vocalists.

Conclusion

The death metal scene has made a grudging acceptance of women in the scene in the last few decades. Women are precisely aware of what a subculture has to offer them, and their acceptance of metal music lies in the fact that they also want to feel empowered. Women have often been placed and bound by societal restrictions where they are constantly dictated to present themselves in a certain manner. The music field appeals to them on the same primordial level as it does to the male metal heads. They are attracted to the animalistic instinct of freedom and chaos. The musical expression of metal helps in the venting of the helplessness that is placed upon them (Vasan 74). If a woman is choosing to listen to, or participate in such music, it isn't because she has a conformist tendency towards the idea presented. She is building her own narrative in it. She is seeking to find a way to re-assert her dominance in the patriarchal community as a whole. The female vocalists talk about one theme in their feminine voice. They are all united against the century old oppressions that have been levied on them. Not ready to accept the society, the answer grows between the heavy metal riffs. They are against any force that wants power over them, be it a system or a man.

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