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# Exposition of Body Aesthetics: Reading Koirala's *Sumnima* and Parijat's *Shirisko Phool*

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## Abstract

The paper aims to examine how the (female) body has been represented in the primary texts selected for this study, namely, B. P. Koirala's *Sumnima* and Parijat's *Shirisko Phool*. In doing so, it analyzes how bodily interactions of the key characters of these novels operate. The paper also makes a comparative inquiry into the body. In doing so the paper utilizes ideas from, among others, Susan Bassnett, Charles Bernheimer, David Ferry. In B. Koirala's Sumnima the title character depicts her robust body in front of Somdatta, her male counterpart but, on the contrary, he fails to appreciate as he lacks the vigor to satiate her appeal. Somdatta's effort of achieving divinity by the power of penance makes Sumnima a victim as two cultures collide. Somdatta's beliefs have been conditioned his Khas-Aryan background and that of Sumnima's by her Kirat culture. Whereas in Parijat's Shirisko Phool, Suyogbir fails to preserve his military ethics and social prestige and becomes mad at Bari's bodily splendor and behaviors.

*Keywords: body aesthetic, penance, prolong history, divine power, salvation, ethics* 

## Introduction

Bishnu Kumari Waiba, who is better known with her pen name as Parijat and Biseshwor Prasad Koirala, democratic leader of Nepal both are well-known for their novels that attempt to expose the body aesthetics. Argumentations on Parijat and Koirala narratives reflect forms of bodily parts in their novels in their own ways. The female character Bari in Shirisko Phool moves round the dialectic of the images of free will through "orchid flower" and the supremacist through "black-bee sting" but "Sumnima floats calmly in the cool water of Koshi" cleaning her bodily parts but sometimes she is emotional and violent, too (Sharma trans. Sumnima 3). Sumnima insists on expositing the bodily parts, she questions on the practices of the AryanBrahmins women's practices and says to Somdatta, "... your mom covers her body day and night with exceedingly long clothes making you easy to turn her into a godly figure from a simple human female, otherwise inside the coverings even your mother has the same things what all women have with them" (Sharma trans. Sumnima 9). She does not argue on the law of nature and welcomes the human activities with motioned and motionless bodily parts. She argues boldly with "strong sense of heroism" with Somdatta (13). Likewise, Bari rejects Suyogbir's suggestion to not to smoke too much cigarettes and says "I'd smoke ten with pleasure" (Blue Mimosa 37) and Bari wants to keep her identity "secure" (Nirman, Shirisko 14) and "feel-fresh" keeping herself free from the supremacy of single truth. In Shirisko Phool, "Bari's desired image, and her overriding persona is a self-esteemed, outspoken and independent woman but the man protagonist Suyog perceives of her as an absurd and heartless woman" (Gautam, Simon 44-56). Men and women characters in Koirala and Parijat's novels argue about social wrongs as they are representatives of the body aesthetics.

In Shirisko Phool 1965, trans. Blue Mimosa 1972, Mujura, an eldest girl of the family exposes immature activities and childish behaviors in front of the guests. She is literate, unmarried and she is living at parental home. She is an innocent girl to whom Suyog, her brother Shiva's friend, looks with wrong intention and intends to make her victim of his dreams and desires. Suyog desires her body for sexual pleasure and his kissing ultimately kills her which raises a question that why does Sakambari resort to death at the moment when her body is touched by a retired military man who looks still young, handsome, exposes his body strongly and behaves emotionally intending for sexual activities that poisons Bari slowly as a part of unfulfilled desire of love. It is a dream desire. She can neither fulfill this dream with her brother's friends nor can she forget him. Possibly, her bodily intended sexual desire that is not fulfilled at the moment kills her. In Shirisko Phool, when Suyogbir looks at Sakambari in the garden, first he guesses her age and observes her body parts. Suyog looks at her clothes for a long and likes them, and entertains her physical beauty whereas Sakambari also is impressed on Suyog's gaze and physical expression. He also observes her sister's body parts and says, "Mujura could not be called an ugly woman" (Nirman, Shirisko Phool 3). When he notices the youngest one, he guesses her age to be sixteen and calls her, "... dark-skinned, but attractive in tight Kurtha-suruwal" (3) and gives Mujura a symbolic name "blue mimosa flower" for their activities and body exposition when he comes in their house observing their body aesthetics. In Sumnima, "Sumnima straightened her body. Somdatta saw that in her body the symptoms of her being a girl were being more pronounced. There flashed an idea into his mind to ask Sumnima to cover her body, but didn't utter a word" (Sharma trans. Sumnima 19). Somdatta dislikes drawing his attention in Sumnima's bodily beauty he stands in his religious convictions as "Shami tree stands on the banks of Koshi River" (19) but Sumnima exposes her bodily parts not only for her sexual desire but for the aesthetic exposition whereas Somdatta rejects Sumnia's bodily exposition and says, "Hey uncultured girl!" (9). Somdatta, though young and handsome does not like body exposition, lures and fails the sexual desire. This researcher's concern is on dual activities of them that is exposed, observed and analyzed through narratives in comparative method.

#### **Body Exposition and Dialectics on Aesthetics**

Sumnima is open about the humanity, love and body aesthetics as Koirala exposes the events narrating through dialectics of Sumnima-Somdatta conversation raising the issues on physical relationship from their perspectives in the climax while setting plots of the novel. She was born and grown up in an open cultured Kirat society and her parents also guided her in the same way. Sumnima explains, "... my mother says that I am quite beautiful and my body is well developed with the stomach prettily shaped and breasts in their right places. Isn't she right, Somdatta?" (Sharma trans. Sumnima 22). Somdatta has a sense of hesitation on male-female relationship and other activities as he is bound with cultural aesthetics. He is much conscious about caste system and religious practices but confused and mingled in the dilemma of life and love and so he has some problems to open the secrecy of his dreams and desires and he warns her to not to speak such words but Sumnima is straight forward. Sumnima talks boldly, keeps her views openly, respects the social norms and values, understands the situation well, obeys the parents and seniors as she honors Somdatta:

"You don't have to be nervous Somdatta. Father asked me to get you bathed in the human pond and fully decorate you in front of the river goddess, so much so that your looks should be completely changed so that you will not be recognized. I have brought all the stuffs in this bag for your transformation, you know!"

Somdatta didn't understand anything. He felt that his brain had stopped working. When he found himself in the present state of affairs, he thought that his fate was playing a joke on him. He had some years ago decided to wipe out the memory of a girl from his heart and entered into a hard penance and dried and emaciated his body and today he was heading towards an unknown place following the same naked Kirat young woman. (Sharma trans. Sumnima 60)

Sumnima speaks frankly, makes the decision boldly and doesn't store the

anger for a long and she believes in the work rather than the luck and easily getting of the things. She understands the time and situation as she is able to change her planning herself in different modes of life but Somdatta lacks the power of making the bold decisions to change him and his faith on concepts of religious beliefs according to the time, place and situation and he responses her in this way, "The body is a pit of sins and you are praising the same thing. Sumnima!" (22). Sumnima and Somdatta make the dialects on different aspects of life, love and the way of living whereas Sumnima focuses on natural process of life and love but Somdatta believes in religious convictions.

Unlike Puloma and other women characters Sumnima challenges the traditional practices of the society about the covered and uncovered condition of the body. She exposes her body parts as writes Koirala, "Her left hand was supporting her breast slightly. She asked, 'Who are you Brahmin?' Without eyeing the young woman Somdatta replied, 'I have the purpose to see the Bijuwa''' (54). As Somdatta tries to pursue her to cover her body she rejects and responses to Somdatta, "No, I feel ashamed when I cover my body, it's quite uncomfortable, yes really!'' (22), whereas Somdatta suggests to be ashamed only when she is naked. Puloma obeys what Somdatta says as an obedient daughter of a Brahmin. She does hard penance neglecting the physical care, destroys the romance of her life and herself in the name of religious faith sacrificing her life to the passion and compassionless male like Somdatta who can neither challenge the social rules nor he can normalize or bring out the solution in the difficult modes of life. In this regard, Dr. Tara Nath Sharma remarks:

The emaciated bodies of Somdatta and his wife due to hard penance with a severe neglect of physical care are totally incapable of reproduction. The tireless and fruitless monthly ritual of reproduction devoid of physical pleasure makes the couple a laughing stock in the eyes of the readers. Bringing out a clear contrast between the physical neglect on the one hand and a robust living in the affectionate care of nature on the other the author tries to drive home into the mind of his readers the superiority of the Nepalese traditional philosophy of the love for human body. (Sumnima, Foreword)

Puloma accepts Vedic and Upanisad philosophy and accepts what her father, father-in-law and her husband say. She rejects the natural process of reproduction and loses the victory of bodily supremacy because of Somdatta who does not follow the law of nature. Somdatta does not honor the love and passion of Puloma even after the birth of their son. He doesn't love well and take care of his son perfectly, rejects the physical presence and he guides Puloma to follow the way of Mokshaya. Puloma shows her anger and says, "...

. vou heartless man! You are my enemy in the form of my husband . . . alas!" (Sumnima 98). Sumnima addresses her son as a fatherless and unfortunate boy. Somdatta is guided by the Mokshaya Principle of Vedas and Upanisads according to his father Suryadatta's wish as it is said, "Somdatta was immersed in the deep studies of the Vedas, the Upanisads, the Vedanta philosophy, etc. He was made well versed in the rituals and methods of fire sacrifices and counting of beads with sacred words" (Sharma trans. Sumnima 60). For Somdatt, physical pleasure is like poison but for Puloma and Sumnima it is a biological need. His hermitage dwelling intoxicated his vouthful figures. Puloma believes on religion, society and cultural philosophy and luck but Sumnima believes on work and changes. Unlike Puloma, Sumnima is bold in Sumnima and the same kind of nature is applicable to Sakambari in Shirisko Phool translated as Blue Mimosa. Comparing with Somdatta in Sumnima, Suyogbir is a different character in the Blue Mimosa who loves making women victim of his passion, makes him busy in observing the women's activities, guessing the ages and evaluating the bodily parts of the women.

In Suyog's opinion, Mujura, Bari and Sanu names in Blue Mimosa are very meaningful for three sisters because Mujura looks like mimosa flower, Bari speaks boldly and Sanu is reserving character. The way to see an outer world of their woman persona is unidentified. Suvog has a history of treating girls like objects to entertain him sexually. Even about Bari, he appears in very dominating and despising manner with varied ways to appreciate and criticize. He finds her eyes rather "inviting/mocking" and comparable to those of, ". . . a mischievous she-cat who wants to tease frequently" (4). He calls Bari an absurd woman evaluating from the body aesthetic rather than judging the world from humanity, moral and ethical perspectives and he never realizes how his World War II experience along Burmese Death Valley forest against the Japanese bombardment turned him a thorough absurd, and a nihilist. Suyog is guided only through the sexual organs rather than sensual sensitivities and devalues to an innocent girl like Bari by forgetting his militarized personality. He becomes more of a patriarch, loses his human values and finally victimizes Bari who dies of his kissing as a final touch for eroticism. But Somdatta in Sumnima keeps him busy in yoga practices and Vedic tantric. He loves doing penance in the hermitage or sitting on the bank of Koshi River under Shami tree in its shade. He has an objection in Sumnima's Body exposition about which Somdatta-Sumnima dialectics are:

> 'Sumnima, go away, go away.' Don't appear before my eyes. Go away, be ought of my sight!' Sumnima was totally flabbergasted. 'Why? What did I do wrong, Somdatta?' 'Your body is an obstacle to

the development of my soul.' She understood what he meant. Looking with oblique eyes and pouting her lips she seemed to be surprised when she said coquettishly. But suppose your soul itself was going to be an obstacle for the development of your body?' 'the soul is permanent, the body ephemeral, and, therefore, we must take the permanent and abandon the ephemeral.' (Sharma trans. Sumnima 29-30)

Sumnima and Somdatta have two different kinds of family background, separate rule books and guidelines as Sumnima is guided by Kirat Bhilla in open culture as she says to Somdatta, "I will massage oil on your back. This oil is made by my father taking out the essence from herbs. Come on. Smell it, what a pleasing scent you feel!" (65). Sumnima is kind hearted and open-minded obedient girl grown up in an open culture but Somdatta is grown up and educated under the strong rule book of Aryan-Brahmin in the parentship of Suryadatta. He trusts on Vedas, Upanisad, Gayatri mantras and the penance in hermitages. Puloma also is grown up in the same kind of family background and she exposes herself in the same kind of background.

Talking about Shivaraj-Suyogbir-Sakambari relationships and dialects in Blue Mimosa multiple questions can be raised. Sakambari dialects are strong but confusing in the matter of love and life. She makes bold decisions about the ways of her life but her death by Suyogbir's kissing is questionable. Shivaraj welcomes Suyog and honors him as a subedar because of his good performance in the office. He has a great history of fighting for freedom and sovereignty, but with an acquaintance of gin and whisky, Suyog underestimates Shivaraj and his sisters. Suyog says, ". . . we were equally matched only in our ability to fill and drain the shot-glasses. He could drink as much as I could" (Varya, Blue Mimosa 5). Simply suffering and honoring do not lead anyone anywhere, ". . . it does not make life meaningful" (Nirman, Shirisko Phool 7). Suyog in the matter of girls is always vulgar and violent but Somdatta respects the men and women both from "sacred thread ceremony befitting the Brahmin tradition" (Sharma trans. Sumnima 3). He observes the things from religious devotion rather than the physical/body-based observation. Somdatta goes regularly to the bank of the Koshi River for religious aesthetic as writes Koirala:

> Somdatta reached the bank of the Koshi River with a water jar, clean cloth and the seat made of the kush grass together with his father very early in the morning when the whole living world was in deep sleep. During the early morning hours the Koshi bank was pervaded with the earthly illness. The greenery of the forest and bushes could not be still unconcerned with the darkness of the night. The glow of the early

morning in the sky at that time used dim. The shrill chirping of birds during the morning appeared like piercing the deep calm by the point of a needle. The river Koshi, which never knew to take rest, flowed nonstop. (Sharma trans. Sumnima 5)

Looking from religious perspective, Somdatta's heart seems pure and clean as the holy water of the Koshi River is. He continues his work daily like the flow of Koshi river water. He grazes the cow, does the ritual in Ganga, puts "whole body uncovered" (5). He is proud of being a son of Brahmin belonging to the Aryan stock. He goes to the river banks with a water jar and sometimes with a cow but Sumnima likes him, his activities and pleasures looking his bodily parts. Unlike Somdatta's ethical activities and religious convictions Suyogbir has an eagle eye on Bari as he remembers that he raped several of the farmers' daughters in the period of war. To some of them he thinks to marry, because they look beautiful. He escapes death with a hairbreadth difference. He feels the war robbed him of everything. So he is "not bored with life" (7). He says war knows no love and no human language; it knows only hunting, killing and chopping up heads for medals but in Sumnima Somdatta does not turn his eagle eyes to the women like Sumnima and Puloma for the matter of sex and other physical relationships. He uses soft, polite and motivating language in diplomatic way to convince Sumnima in the matter of love and romance but Suyog compares Bari's youth with bees stinging flowers.

Suyog, referring to Bari's youth, says, "If the bees can't settle here, what's the use of this flower?" (Varya, Blue Mimosa 14). Bari's youth and bodily beauty is compared here with the beauty of the blooming flower. Bari does not like Suyog's sexual underestimate. He is displeased when Bari tells him that she does not like his idea of letting the orchid flower image as she says, "orchids kill insects fighting with a black-bee soldier" (13). He characterizes himself as an mpty man. Empty man is one who has no problem to solve, nothing to worry about and a man for whom life has a smooth course but in Sumnima Somdatta is empty only in the cases of love for sexual desire as he is guided by religious convictions. He rejects Sumnima's bodily expose as he says, "Sumnima! Your body expose is a vice, it is poison, and it is rubbish! Remove this all and escape away from me" [Trans. mine] (Koirala 56). Somdatta rejects Sumnima's expose of the body parts, sexual expression and emotional activities but Suyog seems hungry of Bari's youth. He feels Bari's behavior to be, "degrading and without respect or courtesy or affection to him" (Nirman, Shirisko Phool 19). Suyog wants to find different characteristics on Bari. He says, "What a difference there is between Sakambari and the stall-keeper's wife; how opposite they are! What after all, is Sakambari? Compared to her, the stall keeper's wife is better. ..." (Varya,

Blue Mimosa 21). Her expression mingles into his mind and evaluates himself differently as Suyog Bir Singh, an old man, drunkard, and a soldier. Ultimately, Suyog thinks of Mujura and begins to make a self-evaluation about Mujura. He finds Mujura very well-mannered in comparison of his earlier evaluation.

# **Research Gap**

Sumnima- Puloma and Somdatta body expositions and dialectics in their narratives about cover and uncover of the body in Sumnima differ in the concept of life and art of living perspectives. Events in the bank of Koshi River, under the shadow of Shami tree and in the religious places create conflicts on believe and unbelieve to the long going religious convictions. In Blue Mimosa, Suyog returns home with a bundle of conflicts and questions in his mind. He does not honor the women in the battle field and also mis-judges on Bari's identity that arouse the questions like: is the kiss love or dominance? Do the bodies expose and eye expression as well as entice activities of the men-women relationship subjects matter on acceptance or rejection/hatred? Is it an event of a rejection of castes,' culture and gender ideology? Are these all events representative for Sumnima and Bari? Do Sumnima and Bari groom so long? Are they real, the truth seeking, pure, virgin and involved in innocent girl activities? To analyze the aesthetic exposition and to answer such questions of both the novelists Koirala and Parijat character's body aesthetics is exposed and analyzed in comparative method.

## **Methodological Implication**

The concept of Comparative Literature which involved a consideration of more than one literature, as Bassnett puts, was in circulation in the West in the early years of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The term "Comparative Literature" seems to have derived from a methodological process applicable to the sciences, in which comparing and contrasting served as means of confirming a hypothesis (Comparative Literature 17). It was controversial in the twentieth century because of the differing interpretations. The so-called French school promoted binary study between two authors or literary systems, in contrast to the American school which argued for wide cross-disciplinary comparison (Bassnett "Comparative Literature" 143). These two approaches, as Bassnett adds, were often reflected in a terminological distinction that sought to demonstrate a difference between "comparative" and "general" literature (143). It is, as defined by Guillen (a French scholar), "a branch of literary investigation involving systematic study of supranational assemblages" (16). The term "supranational assemblages" is too vague to pin down as it can include anything not just literature. The definition given by the American counterpart is more focused as Remak puts:

Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e. g., painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, the social sciences (e. g., politics, economics, sociology), the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. (3)

In more incisive terms, Jonathan Culler states that the central responsibility of Comparative Literature should be "the study of literature" (Comparative 120). Culler thinks the development of national cultural studies, such as French studies and Japanese studies would create environment for studying their literature.

Culler thinks that Comparative Literature has great prospects and it should simply follow the urge of Bernheimer Report 1995 to "abandon its traditional Euro-centrism and turn global" and to "turn from a concentration on literature to the study of cultural productions or discourses of all sorts" (117). Since Comparative Literature is a historical construct, it should most interesting methodological and theoretical participate in the developments in the humanities. And it should do works on humanistic approach because, "... the study of literature in relation to other discourses, is not only necessary but it is inevitable" (119). Now more than ever before, because of the impact of global village, it is paradoxically passing through the strong currents of domination, differentiation, and division of paradoxical life. Comparative Literature has great social and literary role and responsibility to play and dismantle this paradox. The literary comparison goes beyond literature onto identity in terms of distribution of rights, freedom, gender and sexuality. Comparative Literature has the opportunity to move among the disciplines and this movement is at the same time a challenge for the discipline to remain equipped with proper and necessary theoretical approach for research work.

The borders of Comparative Literature are becoming very fluid day by day forcing the practitioners to become dynamic, and address the methodological challenges in the construction of their respective epistemologies. About the scope of Comparative Literature, Jonathan Culler again remarks:

Comparative Literature scholars recognize the fact that their analytical skills can shed light on the structures and functioning of the wide range of discursive practices that form individuals and cultures; and their contributions to the study of philosophical, psychoanalytic, political, medical, and other discourses . . . no one could wish to restrict literature faculties to the study of literature alone. (Culler 117)

Culler's idea about the scope of Comparative Literature is that it can encompass a wide range of social practices including the sexual and other issues such as gender, class, region, age, profession and social discrimination. Discussing on about the scope of Comparative Literature, David Ferrie writes:

Like the humanities, Comparative Literature is now positioned at a point where institutional economics, value, and limit coincide. With the convergence of these three forces, it is no longer simply a matter of discerning how the logic of indiscipline affects this field of study since what has been claimed as strength from within Comparative Literature threatens to become a liability in the broader context of the humanities. However, despite the migration of its practices and interests across other fields of study, there is an important difference to note between Comparative Literature and the humanities. More than many fields in the humanities, Comparative Literature is poised between a debate over what it should examine (Europe, multiculturalism, world literature, for example) and its engagement with the methodological basis of humanistic study. ("Why Compare?" 30)

Comparative Literature, thus, includes studies of more than one literature, languages cultures and societies across time and space that is also applicable in Sumnima and Blue Mimosa. In addition to the body exposition their character and activities also are compared in this study from multiple perspectives.

Respect and/or honor is not in Suyog's dictionary but Somdatta respects the women within the boundaries of Vedic and Upanisad philosophy. For Suyog, "Love was absurd, it was futile" (Nirman, Shirisko Phool 31). To him, Bari is a dramatic-reflective character. In her, he pictures, "a home, a world, affection, and the existence of many living things" (31). Talking to her, he says he feels like begging her for "some alms of life" and "happiness" (31). He conceives the idea of a wife in Mujura without love but Somdatta does not understand the value of Sumnima's love how affectionately she behaves. Both of them have a difficulty in understanding and accepting the interpretation of love and definition of orchid and an insect killer in Blue Mimosa. Suyog thinks that Bari does not like him and she misbehaves when she sees. His opinion on Bari is, ". . . if she sees me, she will probably call me rude, illmannered soldier" (Varya, Blue Mimosa 34). One evening, though Suyog feels uneasy to keep in touch with Bari he recollects courage to meet Bari in the garden amidst blue mimosa. Unlike in other occasions, this time he feels unable to control himself. He appears "trembling" and "impassioned" before Bari and rather unexpectedly "caught hold of her white neck and kissed her soft lips" (27). She feels uneasy. Then in silence, if silence is her reaction, she

leaves him in the garden and goes into house. She does not give value to him as he forgets to honor women and insults by gazing and evaluating the secret parts of her body.

Unlike Bari Sumnima respects Somdatta from every aspect and she tries to turn him to the natural process of living of man-woman relationship according to the narratives of Sumnima. According to Dr. Tara Nath Sharma's translated version of Sumnima, "Sumnima straightened her body. Somdatta saw that in her body the symptoms of her being a girl were being more pronounced. There flashed an idea into his mind to ask Sumnima to cover her body" (Sharma, 19). These events create long going religious convictions and bitter experiences in both Sumnima and Somdatta's life. Likewise, in Blue Mimosa, Suyog returns home with a bundle of conflicts and questions in his mind. He concludes, "It was certainly not approval, but it was not rebellion either, not anger, nor shame" (Nirman, Shirisko Phool 31). Behind these feelings, serious social issues are raised in the novels that are addressed in comparative methods in this study.

#### Conclusion

To sum up the study, finding of this research is that honor is very important thing for each-other's identity. Body aesthetic is supreme source for living with dreams and desire in every one's life. Sumnima and Bari, both are always conscious to protect their prestige in different ways by covering up all kinds of nakedness but their ways of exposing the body aesthetics are different than language, love, life and the way of living. Bari is a kind of moody and difficult character to understand but Sumnima seems calm and behaves in cool manner that does not hurt Somdatta a lot that shifts up to the time of their son and daughter. Taking this point into consideration Suyog questions himself whether I'm not to become the victim of a worthless, futile thing like love? Was I not with my old body, my rough life, my meaningless life about to become the victim of that soft, tender feeling? Somdatta never questions about the life and love and he is proud of religious convictions but he realizes about Sumnima's hearty love in life only after his wife Puloma's death and Sumnima's take care to him. Bari and Sumnima both show gaps between their assumed and desired images between their body aesthetics and social convictions. Sumnima and Bari's desired images and their overriding reflections of body aesthetics are self-esteemed, outspoken and independent women representatives but Somdatta and Suyog's perceives are absurd and heartless reflection of the human activities. Particularly, woman protagonists and characters have serious questions with men for not being sensitive, inclusive and respectful. Textual frameworks capture the actual condition of male-females physical connectivity and erotic activities.

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