Introduction
The construction of a rationalistic system of moral philosophy based on western efforts insists on a universal form of objective and consistent pattern of moral behavior and ethics that is independent of subjective norms. However the rational ethical agent, usually a human being, acts within the moral principles which includes rules of behavior, virtues, judgments, and positions which are embedded within a larger socio-cultural context. Particularly the norms prescribed for the female gender as ideal are often embedded in the somatophobic conceptualisations of the woman’s body and her sexuality. Most of the time these norms are explicitly imposed and at other times they are implied in the language and narratives of the textual authority. A study from the framework of gendered ethics seeks to highlight the philosophical differences that are implicitly hidden in texts related to women such as the Therigatha.

Among the philosophical traditions in India, Buddhism and Jainism are considered as strong ascetic traditions where the practice of asceticism is considered as necessary for liberation. The body and its desires are seen as carnal and an interference in the pathway to liberation in these traditions. An aspirant for liberation is to transcend all kinds of desires, sensual and mental in order to free oneself of attachment to the everyday world. Distractions and the constant calls of the world in the form of temptations of sense pleasures, sexual pleasures and love for kith and kin become obstacles to enlightenment. Sexual desire is particularly seen as a major obstacle to overcome in the path to liberation. In the Buddhist tradition, while there is not much difference in the rules for monks and nuns as regards building of spiritual character, extra rules were prescribed for nuns to defer to the Bhikku brethren and avoid being violated. Such rules are described in detail in the pātimokkha laws of the nuns. One cannot particularly conclude any philosophical context behind these differences as these were created in the socio-cultural context of patriarchy of those times which ascribed similar rules to women who had lost their husbands, or those who were unmarried. Physical restriction on behavior, dress, conduct in public, reduced interaction with strangers, reduced access to public spaces, all of these are well documented in literature and continue to worry women even in today's world. In this essay, I explore the conceptual background of the methods of meditative practices that are represented for us in the poems of the Therigatha that are beyond the general socio-cultural concerns of patriarchy.

Buddhism and Gender
Among Indian intellectual traditions Buddhism is unique in its attitude to women as the texts portray conditions that can be considered somewhat less restrictive when it comes to the participation of
women in spiritual and intellectual achievements. While it may too hasty to suggest that Buddhist women, particularly the nuns were given complete freedom to practice any kind of intellectual activity, by virtue of their being in the Buddhist ascetic order or sangha, it is certainly true that as far as moksha is concerned, they were not denied the practice of enlightenment. Earlier studies on Buddhist literature do not agree on the actual status of women and enlightenment. Whether a woman has to be born as man to achieve enlightenment is a moot point of debate between many schools and traditions. However despite these debates, a somewhat positive picture of woman in this tradition cannot be denied nor can it be denied that there exists within these same sources somewhat ambivalent attitudes to enlightenment. Oriental scholars concerned with the status of women either take a very positive reformist view of these women as Foley CA (sponberg) or see Buddhist women as free but only within what occurs to them as extreme confines of stern rules and restrictions. Tyagi (2014, p.18) suggests that we pay attention to the way women achieved inclusion within the sangha through negotiations though it seemed “… only partially liberating as often it would mean the movement from the confinement of one patriarchal space to another.” She adds that even this represents some agency for women:

“This hints at some agency for women—that they took matters in their own hands and forced to be included in these orders; even though it seems they were expressing their religiosity, they were also aspiring towards enlightenment, seeking an existence outside the purview of domesticity…” This makes clear that the attitudes to women in these texts is ambivalent in many ways and one must study them again and again within interpretative frameworks to understand the layers and complexities of gender representation. Gross (1993, p.30) suggests that the study of literature itself has been androcentric so as to emphasise Buddha’s reluctance to include women in the order rather than the achievements of the Theris (senior nuns).

The poems of the Therīgatha are perhaps the oldest compositions of women’s voices that are available in literature. One can question if these were actually composed by women or were male compositions that describe women’s experiences. Whatever may be the actual case historically, the text available to us suggests some interesting possibilities of understanding the gendered body in the context of soteriological framework. In most texts that are ascribed to women, we do find missing contexts, narratives and absences. This is the case with most texts that have had a history of “androcentric record keeping” as Gross (1993, p.41) suggests. According to her, “the Therigatha serves as a counterbalance to convention.” As a cannon, the Therīgātha is apart of the Theravada texts, belonging to the section called Khuddaka-nikāya or minor collection.these poems are said to one of the first poetical works of women and were composed right from the time of the Buddha to 3rd century BCE. The text within the tradition has special place as oral utterances. These utterances of the Theris are called udāna. According to Dharmapala, the Buddhist commentator this utterance
is the recital of a few or more verses describing the attainment of some form of experience of knowledge. The joy and happiness on the discovery of *nibbana* is expressed as a joyous song.

To examine the ethics of the body, particularly as related to the practice of detachment requires us to pay attention to the actual voices of the Theris or the senior nuns and their utterances which are about enlightenment and not to collectively reduce them to equivocal experiences of enlightenment. The predominance of the references to the body of the woman as significant is interspersed with the references to the background of the *theris* who are singing these poems. The text therefore has multiple voices and this obviously means there are also multiple silences.

Speaking of the Therīgātha and its context of senior nuns who are singing of their enlightenment, one idea that stands out clearly is that this is contrast to certain brahminical traditions where they were largely excluded from soteriological concerns. This soteriological inclusivity is not only genderwise inclusivity but one could say that both Varna and jati, class and caste variations did not apply to the practice of spiritual aspiration. Particularly for our purpose let us understand that quite simply one's gender was not an obstacle to aspire for liberation, socially. This inclusivity is related to the fact that the conditions and practices of liberation are similar to monks and nuns and they have to transcend desire, and understand the true nature of the ephemeral world as cause of suffering and attain the right knowledge.

It is also important to note that these texts are not about Buddhist women in general. As the *theris*, the women composers were clearly enlightened nuns and sometimes disciples of the Buddha. Tsomo in his introduction to the BPS suggests that the women followers of the Buddha in both male and female category were classified for the precepts as laypeople, (upasaka/ upasika) Novices (sramanera/ sramaneri) sikshamana, probationary nun, bhikku and Bhikkuni (fully ordained monk and nun. These are soteriologically ordered and therefore it is very possible that the way the people within the monastic order perceived themselves would be determined to a large extent by teachings that were related to their goals of nibbana rather than those of upasika who for instance performed charitable acts and donated and sponsored the sangha and in many cases fed the nuns and the monks.

In the poems of Therīgātha, somewhat autobiographical accounts of women are provided that show how women from different backgrounds, places, ages and social positions gained the knowledge that set them free.
These women actively desired the liberation, they actively sought the teaching of the Buddha and followed them and also shared their wisdom with other lay people often changing them into aspirants.

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The oft repeated line in many poems is

The three things....

The three things or Tevijjā is almost like a retort to the brahminical traiyi vidhya, the Vedas that very few women could access or recite. (glossary of TG)

These three things that the nuns now knew were

1. Ability to know one's past lives
2. The ability to know where and why other beings are reborn
3. The ability to know one's own moral corruption

Instantiations of all three occur in different poems of the TG.

The idea that one should be aware of one's own moral corruption runs as a foundational theme in almost all poems of TG either covertly or overtly. In fact many poems that relate to the body are the nuns telling us about their awareness of the moral corruption associated with particular layperson views of the body, particularly their own body as a woman's body. I will take up this point later to further this enquiry. In the next section I shall look at some perceptions of the body in the Therīgātha and relate it to some extracted lines from the text.

NOTE:

Unless otherwise referred to, all translations of the text are from Charles Hallisey, 2015 translated under the murty classical library project.

The body as an embodied condition for suffering

the idea that the body and the senses are sites of pleasure that mislead us to seek a false happiness in the impermanence is a common theme of Buddhist teaching. since the world of impermanence arises within the mind of the aspirant, a reversal of this attitude is a necessary and contingent requirement for liberation.zxsaxx Following this many nuns refer to the disappearance of sexual interest, lust and pleasure in many hymns.

SLIDE

Therīka
The idea is that the sexual desire on proper practice and knowledge disappear, creating a distaste for it. The PMOksa sutra also therefore advises novices and initiates not to encourage sexually inciting acts including being in the presence of men alone or associations with lay persons. Conquest and sublimation of desires occurs through a denigration of the body which is blamed for lapses. the theris are explicit in their description of their battles witness urges and the victory over these desires.

The everyday world of a theri alone may be fraught with dangers of promiscuous encounters as in the case of Subha, the disciple of Sugata. While resting alone in the woods she is propositioned by a rake. Sugata rejects his offer in many verses and in the poem dramatically gouges her eyes out to offer it to him nonchalantly since he praised them so much. However we find here a distinct voice that tells the rake that as a nun she was untouchable, while lay women may be sought by him. Here is the voice of a women silencing the voice of a laywoman who may or may not welcome these attentions. a kind of moral hierarchy where the " daughter of the Buddha " is seen to possess a body that is not to be lusted after is clear in this poem. The idea that theri's body after her enlightenment has transformed into an asexual site is strongly emphasised.

Another recurrent theme that is associated with the pleasures that lead the aspirant astray is that of temptations that arise the mind. Usually represented by Buddha's antagonist, the demon Mara who seeks to distract and cause confusion and fear in the minds of the nuns. This is somewhat clearly indicated in the poem on uppalavanna. Mara comes to her as she resting and threatens her that she may become prey to the sexual attentions of a rake. This may be a move on the part of Mara to break the theri's confidence in her own ability to control her urges. Seen as more an internal dialogue that is perhaps allegorically referred to, it only strengthens the nun's beliefs about sexual pleasure. She is able to defeat Mara.

The pleasures

The metaphors and images that are used to describe sexual and sensual pleasures are often negative, whether of violence as we have seen the poem here or sometimes in terms of thieves rouges butchers who are stereotyped villains. Sense gratification is also similar dealt with, with the idea that these are unsafe, un dependable and lastly will be responsible for future births of suffering and misery. Activities that are related to sense gratification are seen as moral transgressions that lead to future
births and suffering. The story of ISIdaani a women who fails to please three consecutive husbands despite her good nature and looks, relates how her adulterous act in one of the earlier lives lead to her Suffering thus and now she found restitution in the true path of renunciation.

Let me not even find something that pleases the senses,  
They are enemies, butchers  
The suffering they bring is what large fires do.

In the list of pleasures renunciation of pleasures of domestic life family or sons need to be given up.

These denial of sense and sexual pleasure is a common theme for both monks and nuns. A desire denying world view is not gender specific to women's bodies alone.  
The PMS relates eight pārājika dharma that are recited. The first forbids sexual contact with animals suggesting a very androcentric view point that was perhaps adapted into the nuns cannon without change.  
The fifth and the sixth both describe sexually relevant actions related to the woman's body, "between the knees" and "between the armpits"

The different contacts are a list of actions such as touching, holding, stroking, pushing, pulling, rubbing up or down, lifting lowering, grasping or pressing.  
The sixth point is not particularly about the body but describes more social relevant actions such as meeting a man alone, allowing him to hold one's clothes, leaning against him, making appointments to meet later secretly etc.  
All these transgressions were liable for expulsion from the order.  
Beyond pleasure: the body as subject and object of pleasure  
The idea of the woman's body is further complicated because within the tradition of Buddhist teachings a woman is not only an experiencer of pleasure but also she is a sense object, a pleasure giving entity.  

Therefore as women, the nuns have to not only control their own urges to indulge gratification but also abnegate their own pleasure giving properties. The theris therefore reject their bodies as repulsive and disgusting through different forms of images.
One of the ways to denigrate the woman's body is to subject it to a temporal analysis and conclude that with age the woman's body loses its beauty and its pleasure giving quality. A few poems speak of the ageing process and the transformation that occurs in the body.

**SLIDE**

Ambapali

These poems that talk of women looking at their own body also have an undercurrent theme of the control of vanity. Women who perceive themselves as objects of pleasure are vain and so the theris overcome this by subjecting the body to the process of ageing.

It is to be noted that voices that recount this are older women, and have let their youth go by wastefully. Ambapalu says further:

Once my body was like that
Now feeble with age and fallen from its pride
It is the house of many sufferings
Like an old house the plaster falling down.

Another way that the body is construed as repulsive is by the actions undertaken by these theris who shave their heads or cut off their hair. Sumedha the princess cuts off her hair and throws it at the feet of her fiancé.

Sayin

**SLIDE**

People cling to the body
Even though it has no essence
And is only a tangle of bones and sinews
A foul body filled with spit, tears, faeces and urine

Another way to turn the body into an object of repulsion is to break it up into parts and divest it of its ornamentation wherein it reveals it true not so beautiful for.

Another way is to turn the body inside out. In an description of the body pointing out the pleasure comes only because beauty is skin deep, the verse of Sumedha articulates further the inside of the body.
If one's own mother were to open it up
and pull what is inside of it outside
even she would not be able to stand the stench
And would be disgusted by it.

IMPLICATION
The tradition records in other texts that the woman's body, intrinsically repulsive is painted or masked
with decorations such as ornaments and unguments such as kohl and red lac in order to attract men.
In this sense the woman's body is a snare used by Mara. (Lang)
As women themselves in the Therīgātha the nuns see themselves and their bodies as dangerous to
to others. Lang (1986) points out:
"Women according to androcentric bias of some of these texts are on Mara's side"
Mara the demon, mentioned earlier uses the bodies of women as a trap and snare male aspirations of
purity. Women's bodies are associated with spiritual impurity as they are capable of seduction. They
become Mara's weapons and bait.

However, We find that in a reversal of the role of the body as pleasure seeking filled with urges,
becomes the very tool for emancipation when viewed correctly, as repulsive and impure.

Lang points this out from the Theragata
"a common thread runs through all of the verses: attention focused on a woman's body - live or dead-
will lead a an to develop aversion for the profane world.
We find here that the body plays an important role in negatively encouraging the aspirant to liberation.
Reflection on the body as repulsive thus is not an act of denigration but an act of reflection. The
woman's body conceived as the painted body, a trap when recognised as ugly and repulsive, leads to
the sublimation of desire and hence becomes a tool for nibbana. This perhaps is based on the idea that
soteriological view that the enlightenment results in pure and asexual beings

The ethical code laid out for the the woman seems to be modification of the code already written for
men and modified a bit, leaving some parts out.
Tsoma writes: ...but the point is that women in advocating the establishment of an order for woman found themselves under the jurisdiction of a code formulated originally for men.

Perhaps these poems are ambivalent because of the late entry of women into Buddhism occurred at a later time when many ethical and practice structures were already set up from an androcentric perspective. The women joined into the sangha later than the men so instead of creating whole new paradigms of ethical practices or creating newer ways of looking at their own bodies women adapted to their own practice with small changes. (Tsomo).

Despite this, what the Therīgātha itself gives us is some Interesting perspectives into the uniqueness of women's world particularly when they reject objectification through a rejection of their bodies as sources of pleasure. Yet one might say they are unable recast themselves in to completely new roles and avoid their bodies being cast into being transcendental objects that are used for repulsion of the mundane. While the dominant narratives are illustrative of this there are also other voices. One for example is the freedom from the domestic role. Many women who are freed of the housework duties declare that they are free in the sense of their traditional roles of the kitchen, marriage and children.

Coming back to the question I started with what is the relationship between women bodies and women in Buddhist thought?
I think that we have discovered that the relationship is of discomfort within the soteriological framework.
In one way one might say that this rejection of the body and its experiences of pleasure are two fold for women. Not only must they not fall prey to Mara but must also be not used by him as bait. This creates a binary of two bodies in two modes:
In experiential terms there is the binary of the pleasure seeking body and the pleasure giving body, a kind of subject-object binary.
On the other hand from a soteriological register, or framework, we find that there is another binary of the body, the painted body of beauty as opposed to the part wise divided and inside out turned repulsive body. (the second being the more authentic picture) this binary is a cultivated image that is required only if one is to achieve nibbana.

We also find a lay woman's body still perceived within the ignorance of the world and suffering has no idea of the other vision of the body, but it is to be contrasted with the body of the nuns who by their very practices have transcended pleasure taking and pleasure giving. So we have a nun's transcendent body versus a lay woman's body.
The above binary is demonstrated and justified further within the ethical and moral rules prescribed for Buddhist nuns in PMS. These rules maintain and keep the bodies of the nuns from falling back into the non-transcendent lay body both as pleasure seeking and pleasure giving. Hidden within these rules is the burden of this responsibility rests with the Bhikkuni and transgressions are not encouraged. The control exercised over the nuns body is not only sexual but it is spiritual. The incitement of passion is dangerous for soteriological purposes.

I find the role of imagination and thought projections in two possible ways that are suggested as methods to women who seek nibbana in buddhist tradition. What is the relationship between imagination, women bodies and women enlightenment? Particularly within the descriptions of women's enlightenment in the poems called Therigatha, we find through the voices given to the women nuns we find some interesting engendered techniques that relevant to this question.

References:
Tyagi, Jaya Contestation and Compliance: Retrieving Women’s Agency from Puranic Traditions 2014, New Delhi, OUP