

GENDERING WOMEN: BODY, POWER, AND THE PROCESSES OF SUBJECTIVATION

FARHAN AHMAD

Department of English, College of Sciences and Humanities in Al-Kharj
Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, 16278, Saudi Arabia

E-mail address: f.ahmad@psau.edu.sa

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5710-7800>

ABSTRACT

Thesis. This study tends to show how various social, cultural, and institutional factors work to discipline women by controlling their bodies at on one level and their thought process at another level.

Concept. The everyday life of women is a space in which the operation of power is manifested through various disciplinary techniques and punitive methods. The basis of such regulations is the result of the construction of gendered bodies.

Results and conclusion. The study sheds light on the ways the body is produced, shaped, and controlled by gendered social norms. The body is repeatedly gendered, and asked to conform to dominant gender norms. These factors affect women's social and sexual behaviour and place them in a subservient position. The study reveals how while generating notions about the other 'gender', the basic essence of 'being human' is often neglected. The claims for the equal space of women are to be fulfilled by formulating the possibility of a space for them which can go beyond the justified constructions of society.

Keywords: body, gendering, power, discipline, regulation

INTRODUCTION

Conceptualizing the Body

The idea of the body is understood in different ways by different philosophers. They have their own ways of positioning 'body' in the larger structures of human life. Some people consider the body as a secondary source through which a mind works. Such positions side-line the body and think of the mind as the object of prime importance. In Indian philosophical traditions, the mind and the body are analysed in numerous ways. In some theories the mind is given the supreme position and body is regarded as something of an inferior and secondary stance. Such a view is rejected by the poststructuralists who consider body as an object of prime importance on which every power structure works. There are various thinkers and theorists who tend to focus on the secondary position of the body in



comparison to the mind. They believe that the immortality of the soul is to be desired and achieved. They consider the body as an obstacle in the achievement of real and spiritual self.

Plato, in his book *Phaedo* (1951) writes, "The body fills us with all kinds of lusts, desires, fears, phantoms and a great deal of nonsense" (p. 11). As a result, human beings are deprived of any thoughtful process which can go beyond these worldly limitations. Human beings are seen as the slaves of these bodily desires. Aristotle, however, rejects such ranking of mind and body as superior or inferior rather he views them as inseparable. The body and the soul for him are the unitary entities. For him this relationship is that of matter and form. In the European philosophical tradition, it is Nietzsche who avoids the soul-body dualism. For him, mind is not a distinct entity from the body but rather a substructural modality of body. He described the soul as a social structure of the drives and affects.

Michel Foucault brings a significant shift in the theorisation of the body. He explains the different forms of power which are applied to the body in order to modify it and make its functions regular. The Human body is central to the question of self and individualisation. Human bodies are regulated in order to discipline the mind. Minds are controlled by capturing the bodies. For Foucault, the body is a discursive construction. It involves various socio-political discourses. The subjectivity of human beings is shaped and reshaped by the disciplinary techniques. He examined institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and schools in order to understand the hidden functions and strategies of power through various structures. These structures tend to control the body and its functions by maintaining its activities and restricting their movements. Power for Foucault is a complex system of different structures which are interrelated and primarily based on the notions of controlling the other. It is very difficult to pin down the boundary of this power structure because, "It is overlapping and infiltrates at different levels, concepts, and areas" (Kobylarek et al., 2022, p. 56). The other here may differ according to the contexts into which the subjects' power are placed. The process of othering involves certain subordinated images of the targeted population which is a result of the representation.

The everyday life of women is subjected to several restrictions imposed by patriarchy. The everyday life of women includes various types of oppression, and at the same time it includes the various possible tactics of resistance. The analysis of the everyday life of women paves the way for further study of their ways of living and day to day experiences. For Henry Lefebvre (1991), the Everyday life is "ambiguous" because it is a space in which power is exercised upon the subjects and on the other hand, it is the domain in which resistance and autonomy can be obtained. The everyday life of women is constituted by repetition. And as ambiguity is the characteristic feature of everyday, it encompasses strategies and tactics which make the women act freely and move out of the dominance. It is the Everyday life of women, in which their bodies, identities, sexuality and gender stereotypes are constructed and regulated.

DISCUSSION

Body and Power

Power as defined by Susan Bordo (1989) is "The network of practices, institutions and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination in a particular domain" (p. 167). This definition of power can be used to explain the maintenance of patriarchy in society. Power creates the hierarchy in society and constitutes the relationships of domination and subordination. The group which holds the power is the one who dominates and the other group upon which the power is exercised is, subordinated. Foucault broadens the concept of power by explaining it as a "strategy" rather than a "possession." Foucault's genealogical works deal with power, discourse, and its manifestation in different domains. The study of the explored areas can be seen as a series: madness, clinic, prison, sexuality and biopolitics. This framework can be effectively used for the study of the oppression of women in their everyday lives. It can also explore the way in which power is normalised in the name of something 'essential' for maintaining the social order.

Power relations are based upon the forms of domination and exploitation. "Power demands a complete submission from its subjects but it has a complex relationship with freedom" (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). Every society includes power relations which is a reason behind the hierarchical nature of society. Foucault (1982) expounds that "A society without power relations can only be an abstraction" (p. 791). Foucault seeks to explore the different discourses that help organise and maintain power relations in society. From the feminist perspective, gender is one such discourse. Women emerge as a powerless category within the oppressive patriarchal structure.

In this context, women are forced to bear the burden of various assigned duties and vulnerabilities based on some physical distinctions from men, acquired by birth, so many of them are the bodily marks which are used to exclude women from the mainstream society. Such an exclusion is a result of the internalisation of gender stereotypes and social roles by women. Women are trained to acquire the discursively perceived beliefs, thoughts, and ideas. They often fail to fuse the roles and space given to them within the new world. And the reversal of some powerfully established structures is not possible by mere thought but it requires the concrete manifestations of the lives of women who are subjected to such power. It requires the knowledge of ground reality and it holds the way to emancipating power. The pressure of the everyday includes some perfect manifestations of the deeper and invisible operation of power.

The power which belongs to the men is exhibited in various forms. These forms are both physical and psychological. They tend to control the thought process of women by controlling their bodies, by restricting their movements, by immobilising them, by keeping them captive in their homes. Further, the institution of marriage positions them in such a way that they

become sex slaves to their husbands. This results in the controlling of their sexuality and desire. They are trained to control their facial expression, gestures, attitudes, movements and even their natural behaviour. Such behaviour gradually develops an inward agitation. The imposition of various traits and images which represent women as either vulnerable, powerless, deficient, or inferior affects their attitude towards themselves. Such representation causes inward agitation. They are made to forget that they too have a similar capacity to think and act. They have internalised the idea that their thought process is of an inferior degree. The changes which women make to their bodies show that the representations are not only some arbitrary symbols rather they are adopted and the body is responsive to the directions given to it. Women have arrested themselves in the social images which are given to them as the models of perfection, not only the physical perfection, in terms of beauty and fitness but also in terms of the regulation of their actions. This regulation as mentioned by Iryna Kocherhina (2018) "Includes control of one's own thoughts, behaviour and experiences" (p. 82).

The shape of their bodies, their movements and behaviour retain some significance since they have provided a 'natural' image of a woman to their minds. The body is the vehicle for such expressions which can show the degree of control which has been exerted upon the individual.

Engendered/Docile Bodies

The most significant issue which is at the centre of this entire discussion is around the gendered bodies. Foucault seems to ignore the specific experiences and circumstances to which women's bodies subjected. The construction of the gendered body and its own forces and operations differ from the general conception of the body. In Bordo's opinion (1989), "The body is a medium of culture. The body is not only a text of culture. It is also, a practical, direct locus of social control" (p. 165). Bordo uses the idea of Foucault about the construction of "docile body," which for her is regulated by the norms of cultural life. She locates the female body within the realm of culture. Cultural values and social norms are inscribed on a woman's body. Women's bodies are disciplined in various ways using various ideological and repressive means. The female body becomes a 'docile body' when it enters a structure of representations and ideals of femininity which are constructed in order to regulate women. These sociocultural norms disguise power. The collective consciousness of women is influenced by the stereotypes which are associated with the civilised and cultured women.

The term stereotype refers to a highly stable belief, almost independent of people's experiences. The stereotype represents the initial classification of phenomena and people, categorising them into groups and, consequently, assigns positive and negative values to the given phenomena and people. Stereotypes are relatively stable patterns that persist even when their new findings do not confirm or even refute them. (Tkáčová et al., 2021, p. 202)

The generalisation of such polished behaviour for every woman generates the will to come together in order to maintain the all-powerful patriarchy. The body is placed at the centre of this whole management. The body receives the orders and manifests the changes which are made by the inscription of physical, social, and moral stereotypes. One such instance can be the moral and social obligation of women to bear children. Maternity also becomes a tool to locate the body in power relations. The body of a woman who cannot reproduce, is seen as deficient.

The idea here is to raise a question about the multiplicities of the body itself. The bodies other than the so-called normal ones are often driven out of the question of recognition and dignity. The representation of such bodies as others are very much political in nature. Foucault's study of power relations and the subjection of the body due to these relations is also centered upon the general conception of body. It does not take into consideration the different types of oppressions which are specifically related to the female body. As pointed out by Sandra Lee Bartky that for Foucault the production of docile bodies is similar for man and woman. She emphasises the point that women's bodies are more docile than those of men. She points out that women are more limited in their movement and living environment than men. She moves towards the engendering of the docile bodies. Women according to this view are positioned differently and they are more restricted than others. The disciplining of the female body is different from that of male bodies (Bartky, 1990, p. 134).

The ideals of femininity are the basic factors for turning the female bodies as "docile bodies." Bordo (1989) calls these ideals as "ever changing", "homogenising" and "elusive." (p.166) In this way, "Female bodies become docile bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, and improvement" (Bordo, 1989, p. 166). The female body is regulated by various ideas and it is normalised by disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress (Bordo, 1989, p. 166). This internalisation leads them to go on the lines of "self-modification" (Bordo, 1989, p. 166). Self modification is a result of the various ideologically constructed representations for women. Bordo (1989) views the disciplining of the female body as a "Durable and flexible strategy of social control" (p. 166). By operating at the level of female body and by mingling the ideals of femininity with the natural environment of female body, patriarchal forces bring the discipline and regulation to the level from which it seems to be very natural and acceptable.

Body and the Embedded Experiences

Talking about the body and the embedded experiences Johanna Oksala (2004) says, "We can only understand as well as experience our bodies through culturally mediated representations, but bodies themselves are also shaped in their very materiality by the rhythms of culture, diets, habits, and norms" (p. 106). The bodies according to this view are socially and cul-

turally constructed but there are various material aspects which add to the existing bodies. This view rejects the perception about bodies as something natural and given, and something which is not subjected to any possible modification and change. The female body gets caught up in the various complex structures of development and maintenance. The bodily functions are natural but their maintenance is very much social and cultural. The idea of a disciplined body can be seen as a culturally and socially embedded phenomenon. The subjectivity of human beings is constituted based on the social as well as the personal consciousness of the individuals. Foucault (1977) believes that the very process of individualisation is an act of locating, distributing, and circulating the bodies in a "network of relations" (p. 146). This process is mediated by the social, cultural and gender norms. An individual perceives and experiences the body in terms of the prescribed gendered identity. Female body is regulated even more strictly because of the inscription of inferiority in terms of gender. The experiences for such regulated subjects are generated by the dominant other.

The experience is an important category in this context. Oksala (2004) argues that "Experience is always structured and constituted by a culturally and historically specific network of practices." (p. 101). Experience has various modalities. It is affected by social, cultural, spatial factors. Gender, class, caste are other factors which mediate individual and collective experiences. In all cases, the body is the medium to experience the outer world. The consistency between one's feelings and expectations and the ultimate things happening in the real world gives pleasure and happiness to the person. On the other hand, the gap between the two, leads to pain and disappointment. The experience plays an important role in the growth of an individual.

Foucault addresses the question of individuality in terms of supervision and regulation. For him, "Individuality provides the fixed positions and permits circulation" (Foucault, 1977, p. 148). This process mediates the circulation of power in the possible areas of life so that every individual can experience it and power can have direct access to the individual bodies and minds. In the context of woman, the home becomes an "organising cell" in which the actual control is exercised. It refers to the idea of 'everyday' in which what one wears, cooks, and cleans becomes a matter of exploration. The female subjectivity is normalised by guiding the behavioural aspects. She acquires the knowledge of various "feminine vulnerabilities." It refers to the set of representations which tend to tag various acts as "feminine" by nature.

The subjects of the power experience it by feeling the pain inflicted upon their bodies. In the prison scenario the criminals are held captive and they are regulated by using various punitive methods. The body is a centre for torture and inflicting pain. These elements produce a new experience to the existing body and the fear of its repetition controls the actions of the individual. The punishment is not something which can efface the crime

but its purpose is to transform the criminal. It must bring the “corrective technique.” The body is the only accessible property of the individual to be corrected so its accessibility and the way in which it is to be transformed is very significant. The power used for such purpose is direct physical power. The body becomes the ‘receptive’ of the punishments and rewards, the pains as well as the pleasure. The ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings are constructed at this stage. The female body is attributed the notions of vulnerability and powerlessness. It is a result of the historically established and socially accepted representations. The female body becomes a productive body in the manner of its capacity to reproduce which tends to give a unique function to it. The labour done by women is denied and her everyday household chores are deprived of any productivity. Her body is conditioned in such way that it enacts as a passive force which must receive various elements from the other. The representation of women as sexually passive is a result of such conditioning.

This idea about experience has an impact on the theorisation of experience. It locates this category in the larger contexts which tend to modify and create different experiences for different classes, castes, and genders etc. The larger and significant parts of the experience are predetermined and socially and culturally constructed. But this view about experience does not discard the importance of such category as the basis for different studies. The experiences of people talk about what the other person has gone through and how it is affected by different variables. The idea of experience, identity and individuality are linked because they share many common grounds. They are centred upon a body that links them together. They all have their roots in the social set up and the social conditioning. These factors are determined by the pre-existing conditions.

The individual subjects are placed into a structure in which the power relations are at work and in such relations, the body comes into the hold of others who exercise direct or indirect control over it. A woman’s body enters a machinery of power that modifies her actions in order to reshape and control the thinking. The pain caused to the body generally produces a fear in the minds of its receptors. Fear is a psychological state which is stimulated by the physiological mechanisms. The mind of women is controlled by giving them directions for leading a better and peaceful life. In this way society normalises the rights of fathers over their daughters and rights of husbands over their wives. The social control is maintained by setting and using the examples about what is normal and natural. The only way which is natural and normal for women is to follow the given instructions and be a passive recipient of the violence done to them.

Women are regulated by telling them the different narratives about the consequences of the actions of those who have tried to transgress the boundaries. The tradition of storytelling and sharing the experience plays an effective role in this context. The older women work as the mediating factors between generations. They share their own experiences. And as a

result, the past ways of dominance, the diffusion of aptitudes and skills are transmitted. The beholders of power tend to spread the disciplinary procedures by narrating them the consequences of transgressions. Such transmission takes place in the day-to-day interactions between women. The very space of home becomes a laboratory which can "Carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals" (Foucault, 1977, p. 203).

Bordo emphasizes the various factors which are unique to the experience of women. According to her:

Loss of mobility, loss of voice, inability to leave the home, feeding others while starving oneself, taking up space, and whittling down the space one's body takes up—all have symbolic meaning, all have political meaning under the varying rules governing the historical construction of gender. (Bordo, 1989, p. 166)

All are the important defining features for the experience of women. These factors are normalised in the lives of women and represented as natural parts of the life of any woman. Women are trained from the beginning to feed others and they are made to learn the ways in which they can control their appetite. In this way, experience also becomes a socially constructed phenomenon which is highly controlled and intentionally designed. And the body becomes the target of every atrocity done to the individual. The process of generating experiences is also a strategy for exerting power.

Female Body and Social Conditioning

The process of social conditioning begins the moment a child is born. It includes the various "ordinary" and familiar concepts which with the passage of time have become so natural that one cannot even think of them as "socially constructed." The sexual orientation of the child is taken as the basis for the further development of the child. Sex, according to Jyoti Puri (1999) "enables the mechanisms of power upon the body" (p. 07) which put the human body on the ways of the normal and natural development of body and behaviour in order to maintain the gendered identities. This requires the "consent" of the people which inflicts shame on those who could not manage to adjust themselves according to the social norms. The female body is regulated by different physical, psychological, social, and cultural factors.

Gender is the most prominent factor which is used to mark the identity of an individual. It decides to which social group the individual is going to belong. The body is taken as the basis for the formation of such conditioning. The basic markers of the gendered identity include naming, clothing, hairstyle, toys, games etc. The gender roles are produced, reproduced, and managed in our everyday life. It involves the disciplinary techniques which shape the mind and the body of females in such a way that she visualises a certain fixed behaviour of the women and accepts that as the only acceptable and normal behaviour.

Women have a long history of subjugation and repression and it includes various feminine models which serve as a point of reference for the shap-

ing of future generations. The entire social structure is based upon the set of images which are fixed and natural. The representation of such socially and ideologically constructed images makes it look more natural and even desirable. The only natural and normal way of living is the major obstacle in the way of any social change. The identities change with the change in context and even with the spatial shift. The identity in this way is not only a social but a spatial phenomenon.

The behavioural changes are very significant for regulation. These changes are noticed by keen observation. Certain behaviour at a certain age is objectionable. The collective effort to retain such images is also a result of the individual as well as collective psychological control. To locate the beginnings of notions and sources, it is very important to analyse the related concepts. It requires the elucidations of various traditional opinions and propositions which have constituted it. This abstract set of principles and rules has a material and physical basis and outcomes. Their basis can be examined in the new forms of power which work either in a hidden or indirect form or in a direct, violent form. In each of its forms, power is useful for the appropriation of society. The penalty according to Foucault (1977), "Transforms, modifies, establishes signs, arrange obstacles" (p. 107). The whole idea of imprisoning, torturing, disciplining has a common motive that is to capture the individual body and control the minds. Foucault describes the various measures of the imprisonment in its initial stages as augmented by the measures like solitude, a deprivation of light, and restrictions on food. These elements are included in the initial stages which further lead to the final and complete confinement.

Deprivation is an important part of the process of punishing. The prisoners are deprived of their most precious possessions. In the context of the women as, it seems to be very important that they lead a life of deprivation. They are deprived of basic human rights. The inhumane treatment given to them is a result of such deprivation. They are deprived of the liberty and deprived of the access to the outer world. Their thinking and decisions are full of inconsistencies and inaccuracies. This belief has made women believe in the fact that they have some serious flaws in them. Their success in some parts of their life is seen as accidental, irrelevant, and even trivial. These effects are made to be seen so plausible that women see themselves as instinctively fallen to this illusion.

The prisoners are subjected to detention and repetitive work. They are given the instructions and then asked to acquire the habit of regular work and self-correction. The everyday restrictions on the actions, movements, food, and regulations on their body are the apparatuses for modifying the individual. Imprisonment has the purpose of transforming. And women are always provided with a restricted environment even in their homes. Their lives are characterised by monotony and repetition. Women are made to learn the ways of dealing with the situations in the ways which are identified as feminine.

Female Body and the Male Violence

The social conditioning gives rise to the acceptance of oppressive acts which take away the "honour, dignity and even life." Domestic violence is one such act. The physical torture and punishment tend to generate the collective fear and the entire scene gets engraved in the memories of the people around. All these factors affect and dismantle the female body

Foucault describes that the punishment is regulatory in nature since it tends to generate fear in the minds of its receptors. The fear of being punished modifies the individual's mind and puts him/her on the way of self-regulation. Such parts of the public collective memory are used for controlling future decisions and actions. This entire process involves the setting of examples which are meant to horrify and control the other individual to take any contradictory steps. "One punishes not to efface the crime, but to transform a criminal" (Foucault, 1977, p. 126). The central mechanism according to Bartky involves "transformation." So, the idea of disciplining women on prominent feminine lines is as technical as the treatment given to the prisoners who are kept for reformation.

This is the criterion in which women are given the examples of some ideal feminine models which are to be followed in order to have a normal life. In contrast to this, the image of the women who had ever tried to transcend the social boundaries is presented. Such binaries are based on the ideas of rewarding and punishing. The choice between these elements is given by presenting both the elements as referring to the fixed ways of life, the inevitable social laws, and the fixed conditions of existence. The character of women is determined by the forces outside the control of their will. The moral and social conducts have a causal relationship with the actions done by women. Working within this framework is deeply inscribed with the theoretical construction of feminism and it reveals the various factors responsible for it.

Caste and Class

The gendered bodies of women belonging to lower castes and classes are shaped by "Poverty, malnutrition, heavy burden of work, gender discrimination, and so on" (Sabala & Gopal, 2010, p. 44). The caste system in Indian society includes the issues like "untouchability". The touch also pertains to the body. It is by maintaining the bodily distance, the upper-class people have for a long period established their power. The body becomes the medium for internalising such abstract forms of power. Puri rejects the categorisation of women as group with same kinds of experiences and as subjects of similar forms of power. Puri (1999) describes that "Woman as a category cannot be privileged within feminist discourse to the exclusion of categories of race, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, colour, class, and caste, among others" (p. 5). This description talks about the diversity of experiences within a group which is seen as a single unitary entity and such a view is based upon the idea of Gender.

A Dalit woman has to go through the oppression which is manifold. She is deprived of the basic sources such as food and required care during

childhood. She is educationally disadvantaged, subjected to domestic and sexual violence and child labour. Poverty becomes the central factor in her experience. The class conflicts are the basis for many oppressions done to the people belonging to the lower-class people but women have a different location in such conflicts. They are not given any access to the economic and political domains. They have no or very little connection with the efficient ways of earning a livelihood. The work done by them is often considered to be of a lower degree than that done by the men. Their physical labour is denied outside the home and they are restricted to the household chores which have given them the fixed positions and a permanent commitment to the "unpaid labour."

The power structures or social hierarchies which give rise to the caste identity are the representatives of culturally specific and socially embedded differences. "Different categories of women face different kinds and levels of oppression. Their particular social location in a radically stratified society accrues different privileges and disadvantages to women" (Bazaz & Akram, 2021, p. 191).

Female Body, its Regulation and Surveillance

Bartky describes various disciplinary techniques which are used to regulate the female body. She describes the everyday scenario for the women are kept inside the dominant ways of moving and interacting. It includes the whole idea of socialising. Bartky (1990) observes that "There are significant gender differences in gesture, posture, movement, and general bodily comportment: Women are far more restricted than men in their manner of movement and in their lived spatiality" (p. 134). Bartky explains the idea of femininity and gendered identity of women by using the framework given by Foucault. She acknowledges Foucault's negation of the gendered differences while talking about the body and its subjugation. She attempts to bring into light the ways of regulation and control which are gender-specific. The feminine ideal is maintained by a rigid posture and general manner of movement. A woman's space as Bartky (1990) describes "Is not an arena in which her bodily agency can be freely realised but an enclosure in which she finds herself positioned and by which he is imprisoned" (p. 134).

Foucault uses a model of prison by Jeremy Bentham's design for the Panopticon, in order to explain the disciplinary nature of modern societies. A panopticon is a central observation tower placed along a circle of prison cells. Then, it is only necessary that a watchman be placed in the central tower and a lunatic, a patient, a criminal, a worker, or a schoolboy be locked in each cell. All the people which are kept in the cells are placed in such a way that they are devoid of any interaction with the outer world and even with each other. The incongruity of the behaviour in the prisoners is given as an excuse to deprive them of any interaction. Such acts tend to make the people be governed easily. They are the objects of transformation and in order to justify such points it is very important to represent them as abnormal. It results in

the production of a different state of mind for the individual is kept inside the cells. "It induces in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Bartky, 1990, p. 201).

This conscious and constantly visible state is a sign that the rigid, disciplinary control of the body has taken hold of the mind as well. As a result, subjects of this power develop a habit of "self-surveillance." The idea of self-consciousness and individuality seems to be a mere reflection of instruments of power which, according to Jeremy Bentham, are and should be "visible" and "unverifiable" (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). Surveillance, hierarchy, observation tend to immobilise the entire population which is subjected to dominance. It controls individual bodies while maintaining the function of a broader power which is disciplinary power. The structure of our society seems to have an ideological similarity with this model of prison in which power is placed at the centre and the powerless at the margins.

Body and the Process of Stigmatisation

Puberty is marked by the various bodily changes in girls and menstruation is one of them. Although it is a biological phenomenon but it has larger social, personal, and cultural meanings. As Iris Marion Young (2005) says "Socially caused discomforts and oppressions associated with the experience of menstruation" (p. 97). The experience of this physical phenomenon is full of anxiety for women because of the notions attached to it. It is associated with the need for disciplining and self-regulation, because now this body is no more 'asexual'. The attribution of sexual meanings to the body has made many girls a victim of child marriage because it is seen as a symbol which denotes the 'marriageability' of a girl. The perception about the beginning of the menstruation in girls is seen in two different ways. Young observes that on one level society wants young girls to feel proud to be women, with sexual and reproductive powers included in menstruation. On the other hand, they must be careful and conceal evidence of their bleeding from family members, schoolmates, and even strangers on the street. This duality in behaviour is a result of the complex social and cultural representations and stigmas which are associated with the menstruating female body. It is often mistaken for the physical and social maturity of a girl to sexuality and maternity.

The female body acquires a different dimension which requires discipline and regulation of both body and the mind. Such beliefs have a strong psychological hold upon the people in India who misunderstand the sexual maturity with the menstruation cycle. Women are always asked to maintain the social and personal space provided to her with full faith and responsibility. It is taken for granted that women must maintain the dignity and decorum of the house. The inconsistencies in their day-to-day life are to be seen as the violation of her natural duties. There is nothing which can release her from the captivity of time.

The body is a site of violence both sexual and physical, the female body is the site of desire and centre of pleasure for the male. She is subjected

to sexual violence both inside as well as outside the institution of marriage. Her character gets manifested in her ability to manage the household chores. Her potentialities are transformed into the mere reflections of her ability to manage the household and social relations. Her desires and needs are regulated and directed towards a different way which is not her own natural way of exploring herself.

“Women’s labour has continued to be undervalued, whether inside or outside the home, as domestic/sex labour, as productive labour within the home or as agricultural and other formal and informal labour” (Sabala & Gopal, 2010, p. 44). This statement refers to the normalizing tendencies which represent the women’s capacity to work as mere illusion. Their hard work and efforts are disregarded of any value and respect. The works done by her, be it household, field work, sexual, child bearing, and nurturing and caring the children and the family are seen as mere natural duties. They are devoid of any economic significance. Their duties are predetermined and the orders are made by an envisaged entity which makes them feel all the works and duties given to them as natural and normal. And if they refused to adjust themselves in such structures then they will be strained away by the moral forces. They will be responsible for the conflict and collision of the forces which are internal to any society.

Women are regulated in terms of their sexuality and bodily desires. They are placed within the framework of ‘heteronormativity’ and that too in the more restrictive institution of marriage. Sexuality is “Often experienced through the physicality of our bodies” (Sabala & Gopal, 2010, p. 46). So, the female body becomes a major site of pleasure for the male desires and takes a subservient position. The transgression of such restrictions is often controlled or even deemed by giving a parallel image of a “loose woman” who have no self-respect and devoid of all the dignity. The “loose woman” as described by Bartky (1990) “Violates these norms: Her looseness is manifest not only in her morals, but in her manner of speech, and quite literally in the free and easy way she moves” (p. 134). Such stigmatisation of one group of women leads to the more regulated behaviour of the other women.

CONCLUSION

The body is the central focus of current study as manipulated and transformed by patriarchal forces. The regulation of women’s bodies is essential to the construction of gender identity and the subordination of women. The location of the body in women’s everyday lives is explored by linking disciplinary techniques, seeing the body as a source of embodied experience and the body as the basis of social conditioning. The study highlights that the human body is produced, shaped, and controlled by dominant gender norms and expectations that are “Reinforced from early childhood through the process of socialisation” (Kowal et al. 2022, p. 459). Bodies are repeatedly gendered, and asked

to conform to dominant gender norms. These factors affect women's social and sexual behaviour and place them in a subservient position.

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