

Abstract

The female body has been a site of dominance and resistance across many oppressive cultural regimes. Historically, women's bodies are treated as passive sites for patriarchal models of power exploitation. In the realm of everyday, the female body is constantly shaped according to changing political and cultural ideals. It has been widely represented as a mute responder to regulatory social impositions. It has been recurrently located in utilitarian environments where it is objectified under the male gaze in a multitude of contexts. However, despite this dominant narrative of passivity associated with female embodiment, even with all the systematic silencing of its trauma, the female body serves as a tangible archive of gendered oppression. The female body is so deeply entangled with its cultural surroundings, that it is practically impossible to study it in a homogeneous sense. Since the body is so visibly marked with class, race, caste, ethnicity, and other such vectors of socio-cultural identity, it is imperative to read the body in its cultural location. Thus, this research looks at the embodied realities of women's bodies in three Eastern Indian states Assam, Odisha, and West Bengal. Since there is undeniably a lot of cultural diversity even within these three states, this research specifically takes up fiction written by women writers of these three regional linguistic traditions as its focal point of analysis. To conduct a comparative analysis of how the female body is represented in these socio-literary women's fiction, this research takes up their English translations as its primary resources.

Any research on the female body can take multiple paths owing to the multiplicity of the modes of gendered violence it endures and so it is important to draw a specific line of queries that would define the aims and objectives of this research. In this study, there are three core chapters, broadly exploring three major strands of oppression: the political, the cultural, and the social. Firstly, the research aims to understand how the female body becomes a tool for expressing political dissent during wars or communal riots. In this investigation of how women's bodies are exploited for political gains or to make political statements, this research studies the displaced female body, especially when displaced forcefully in response to political turmoil. It focuses on literary representations of wars, communal riots, ethnic riots, or partition-based mass migrations in the selected Eastern Indian regions to interpret the state-sanctioned strategic modes of inflicting corporeal trauma upon the racially undesirable female body. For instance, it looks at how the

Assamese-Chinese pregnant women were treated during their forced displacement in the aftermath of the Sino-Indian war (1962) through a textual analysis of Rita Chowdhury's *Chinatown Days* (2018) or how the multi-ethnic female body is treated in the contexts of Assam Agitation which witnessed battles for cultural supremacy. Secondly, this research studies the twice-marginalized tribal and Dalit female body, problematizing how they experience a double layer of exploitation both in their hierarchical subjugation by men of dominant social classes or castes and also within their communities by the abuses of subaltern masculinity that only manifests itself on the subaltern female body. This research also examines traces of any literary representation of bodily resistance where the marginalized female body attempts to alter its subalternity. Thirdly, this research questions the modes of bodily oppression within the sphere of domesticity and reads into the cultural nuances of disciplining the female body against its sexual desires even inside the legitimate allowable realms of sexuality in a heteronormative marriage. It looks at how the sexual transaction in a marriage is often scripted according to male desires while the wife is only used as a prop to satiate the husband's fantasies. This particularly aids in understanding the mechanism of marital ownership of the female body not just within marriage but also beyond it, after the death of the husband, through the restrictive corporeality imposed during Brahminical practices of widowhood.

This research also traces how certain literary characters present alternate scripts of bodily resistance as they rigorously pursue the pleasure their bodies seek, transgressing the boundaries of marriage. This research although traces representations of how female bodies are caged in all these contexts, it also predominantly interprets the modes of resistance that come in the form of reactionary embodied performances in response to such limitations. Through its interpretations of relevant literary case studies, this research highlights the urgency to deconstruct the meaning-making processes of hetero-patriarchal power discourses as manifested in the female body. It demonstrates how literature serves as a crucial intervention in archiving representations of bodily trauma that are often otherwise neglected in everyday contexts. It makes a conscious effort to focus on narratives of women by women to avoid any appropriation of bodily experience.

Keywords: Body Politics, Women's Fiction, Displaced Female Body, Subaltern Female Body. Desiring Female Body