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Examining the Diversion of Objectified Body in “*The Testament*” and “*The House of Hidden Mothers*”

Aparna

Department of English and Modern European Languages

Banasthali University

Banasthali-304022

Abstract:

The harsh reality of the body existing through the cultural light has set the Marxist model to recreate the rays. The sexualized effect on body made the phenomenal changes wrapped in *The Testament* and *The House of Hidden Mothers*. The cultural beam starts with the light of women’s body, which is often seen as the entity of male gaze, commodified object and as the subject of voyeurism. The presentation and representation of women’s body throughout centuries have been the objects of erotic concerns. The Womb connotes the phenomenological reality of woman which is the source of reproduction or new life. The postmodern era has erased the pious relation of mother-child with the producer-product. Women being the product of patriarchal society has always been suppressed, exploited and used for their own purposes. In the metaphysical tradition, the body has been explained as the embodiment of truth, moral values and cultural experiences. While in the contemporary era the chain of culture has entangled the body. Every woman who is forced, punished and controlled breaks the

harmony and believes in herself by liberating her body. The paper intends to examine the possibility of the liberation of women’s body by celebrating it rather than by being burdened by it. Thus, the social construction and the psychological phenomenon tend to release the change which carries the key of choice. Therefore, the paper tries to suspect the immolation of women’s body by unveiling the market set for objectifying the body through the channels of surrogacy.

Keyword: Body, Surrogacy, Objectified, Womb, Male gaze

Introduction:

Women and her body have created the historical standpoint where the cultural, social, economical and political structures are rebuilt in the awakened form of feminism. The eastern and western thinkers have different opinions when the politics of body is viewed through the philosophical and intellectual realities. The oppression, suppression or hegemonized state of

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women is driven by the patriarchal society who ruled the body throughout centuries and still continues. Discourse on body starts with material and realistic function of male gaze, as for male the female body is the part of celebration and the object of repression. Women's body has played a crucial role throughout the history of cultural power residing the relationship of man and woman. Moving from the western tradition to the biological theory which defines body in different light, as the body is consumed by the male members of the society. Women who were not slaves typically but were the soul property of their father before marriage and after marriage they were hand-over to their respective husband. Rose Weitz in the article "A history of Women's Bodies" (2017) explains the situation of the submissive bodies who move from and for the male, because the bodies are controlled by them.

“ Beginning with the earliest written legal codes, and continuing nearly to the present day, the law typically has defined women's bodies as men's property. In ancient societies women were not slaves typically belong to fathers before marriage and to their husbands thereafter. For this reason, Babylonian law, for example, treated rape as a form of property damage, requiring a rapist to pay a fine to the husband or

father of the raped woman, but nothing to the woman herself”(248).

Likewise, the women become the part of the contract in between men of both the party. This practice was in the ancient society which is also followed in the present society. Rose Weitz has also discussed about the Aristotle's scientific standpoint on the women's body which depends on the concept of heat. “According to Aristotle, only embryos that had sufficient heat could develop into fully human form. The rest become female. In other words, woman was, in Aristotle's words, a “misbegotten man” and a “monstrosity”- less than fully formed and literally half baked” (249). The women were never her own subject as she was generally the subject of study, suppression and gaze only for men. It's been centuries that the women were created and erased according to the male members, as the society rules in the patriarchal palm. Feminism was the attempt to relocate the identity and individuality of the female who were submerged in the garage of misogynist society. The culture of the society never helped women to read and educate themselves to know their own rights. They were baffled to see the increasing number of women who were considered frail being entered into the education and employment which rejects the strong echoes of religious and Aristotelian view to disdain women and her

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bodies. Vern Bullough and Martha Voght in the article “Women, Menstruation and nineteenth-century medicine” (1984) explicates that the educated and employed women have difficulty in producing the child.

“ The president of the Oregon State Medical Society, F.W.Van Dyke, in 1905, Claimed that hard study killed sexual desire in women, took away their beauty, and brought on hysteria, neurasthenia(a mental disorder), dyspepsia (indigestion), astigmatism (a visual disorder) and dysmenorrheal (painful menstruation). Educated women, he added, could not bear children with ease because study arrested the development of the pelvis at the same time it increased the size of the child’s brain, and therefore its head. The result was extensive suffering in childbirth by educated women” (32).

The educated and employed male might have a suffered from the same problems but the consideration is shown towards the women which claim the difference in sex. Despite all the differences which are considered ideologically challenging for the woman’s body and her social status she creates her own history. Susan Faludi in the text *Backlash: The Undeclared war Against American Women* (1991) has taken many forms which includes, the increasing

pressure to maintain the body in perfect shape, the women as ill in her premenstrual and postmenopausal and rising for the fetal rights and anti-abortion movements.

The second sex in the contemporary era are being more inclined towards the beauty myth which is also controlled by the patriarchy as Imelda Whelehan in the text *Modern Feminist Thought From the Second Wave to ‘Post-Feminism’* (1995) explains that even the successful women are the victims in the world cosmetic surgery. To match the western standards of fashion and beauty women are moving towards the perfection in the body size and calculating the beauty through surgery and use of silicones. Particularly in media the exposed body of the women becomes the market strategies for consumerism. This body shaming questions the other female and the demand increases for being white and slim. Rather being bodily fit the women started cutting the fat for being in the slot of slim and distorting their diet. Jean Kilbourne in article “Beauty and the Beast of Advertising”(2017) traces the advertising policies which the industry invest according to the body and skin to influence the consumers with the creative artificiality.

“The aspect of advertising most in need of analysis and change is the portrayal of women. Scientific studies and the most casual viewing yield the same conclusion: women

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are shown almost exclusively as housewives or sex objects. The housewife, pathologically obsessed by cleanliness and lemon-fresh scents, debates cleaning products with herself and worries about her husband's ring around the collar"(184).

Beauty becomes the highest achieving object for the women as her whole body signifies the objective of being young. From the long slim legged to the wrinkles which indicate that the females should remain forever young. The perfect bodily figure and beautiful woman in movies, adds and on posters regardless of the products the aim becomes to be what is shown to the audience. To emulate these ideal figures women are constantly exhorted and feel ashamed, down and guilty if they are unable to achieve. They had made the criteria that are contingent upon the bodily perfection which is mostly desirable and lovable. There are more than millions of beauty products which enhance the artificial beauty and despite knowing this many females move far for manipulating and changing their faces and bodies. The conditioning of every woman is such that she feels embracement or dissatisfaction for her own natural look if it's not perfect. The constant need of the hour is the makeover with new looks, alteration and improvements according to the latest fashion. These struggles create mask out of the face of the women and the bodies are in

disguise which is the object or thing for the men.

Librating force which is taken place in the sequel of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1996) by knitting the complex structures of past and then reviling the uncertain future through different events in *The Testaments*(2019). Every woman who were forced, punished and created breaks the harmony and believes in themselves by liberating their bodies. When the body enters into the stage of philosophical discourse the culture also plays the predominant role, as the body from time immemorial has been encircled by the tradition and hence, never been defined as natural, functional or desired body. In the metaphysical tradition the body was explained as the embodiment of truth, moral values and cultural experience. Friedrich Nietzsche in the book *Beyond Good and Evil* (1989) expounds about 'nihilism' which means rejecting the worldly pleasures of body and earth, which is mainly seen in the fields of religion, metaphysics, transcendental consciousness and science. "Nietzsche believed that humanity has to get rid of nihilism was taken up as the central project of his philosophical activity by Nietzsche. He also expressed his hope in the philosophers of the future who will bring new goals to human existence"(52). Philosophers during the time of Greeks have been debated about the metaphysical and morals of the body which existed in the pre-historical stage as

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tamed, sucked, humiliated, silenced and contained as the suppressed entity. Henceforth, the reclamation should change, as the body celebrates the contested site of flux, being concrete, sensual and material rather being abstract, rational and spiritual. In the post-modern epoch the body is seen more weighing than the mind as it is viewed as more propelling force, whether it's about ethics, moral values or aesthetics in day to day life or the beautification of the body. Abey Koshy in the article "Reinvigorating the Body: A Critical Analysis of Agency in Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze" (2014) talks about the body according to different philosophers.

"Even the Darwinian kind of biologism, the most influential modern materialism lies far away from the bodily materialism of Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze who perceived body and consciousness, matter and spirit as one and the same. Spinoza who propounded psycho-physical parallelism is probably the only forerunner to such a thought in the history of philosophy. Deleuze who has developed his body thought from the philosophy of Spinoza has said that 'life is a flow of desire', and its parallel can be seen in Nietzsche's idea of 'the will to power'" (136).

There is an unresolved dualism in the body and consciousness, these spiritualists who move away from all the dispose of matter and body which remains valueless trash for them, after the relevance of material and spiritual. As consciousness is taken differently from the body because the reality lies beyond desires for the awakened soul. Body is seen as the prison for soul and also as hindrance for moving towards the functioning of consciousness. Nietzsche enters this debate to refute the traditional concepts of metaphysics, spiritual, soul immortality and divinity. He tends to develop a new philosophical thought on body. He gives an example from the text *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1969) "moral values are not something originated from transcendental archetypes or forms as Plato claimed, but the outcome of the type of food a person eats and the climatic condition of a land in which a person lives" (237). Thus, all the values, beliefs and thoughts developed in a human are the result of bodily origins. When the world started the human were also the part of natural animal being, but eventually due to the spiritual awakening the human turned their way towards humanity which made their anthropocentric attitude more rational. The replacement of naturalistic-animal order of human carried many reasons such as divine power, consciousness and values acquired by spirituality. And Nietzsche viewed this part as the strong case of 'nihilism'. Nietzsche explains this in the

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text *The Antichrist* (1990) that he wants to bring the human back into its original natural-animalistic form. He says “we no longer trace the origin of man in the spirit, in the divinity; we have place him back among the animals” (134).

So, the basic attempt is made to bring the human back into the animalistic element of nature from the humanism which is considered as the lord of universe. Nietzsche thought was staged into two forms of bodily discourse; one was phenomenological view which got the spectacles of body consciousness unlike transcendental consciousness and the second was of the view from poststructuralist that the body has a political sphere in the modern epoch which undertakes the investigation. This is to perceive that the body which is tamed, used and deformed in the modern culture is being restructured to carry out the task assigned to it. “Poststructuralist project is meant to unravel the techniques employed by the dominant powers to tame and organize the human body in different periods in history. Their project is to produce a genealogy of the body rather than providing simply a theory of the body like phenomenology does”(138). Nietzsche release new prospective which philosophers were unable to unwrap that the body can also exist devoid of spirituality which becomes the external factor to control its natural essence. The classical case by

Aristotle who introduced about the external factor i.e. God (who is the unmoved mover and is the cause of the creation) controlling every movement of the body and matter.

“Nietzsche is the first person in the history of thinking who showed that the body does not require any external mental substance for instigation of its movements and thoughts. With the announcement of the ‘death of God’ he was actually making the body free of external control of spiritual substances. He replaces it with a force that is an attribute of the body itself which is the ‘will to power’”(139).

With this discussion the responses enters with the Foucault’s idea drawn from the Nietzsche’s critique of nihilism, he asserts that from the historical period the body is something which is molded, tortured and reshaped by the dominant force of power. With slight disagreement with Nietzsche, Foucault explicate body as the human body shaped by culture which eventually goes through different changes either through physical torture or by the numerous discourses on it. In the article, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1984), “he does not speak of any bodily attribute or force that works from within the body that shapes its agency. Rather, the body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest and

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holidays; it is poisoned by food or values” (83). Therefore, neither the psychological characters define the human nature nor the physiological movement shapes the body rather the discipline of the society creates the human body.

The women as surrogates clearly adopt the work of mothering wherein she becomes the producer and the child is the product. Commodified womb which is considered as an object or machine to produce what is injected. Meera Sayal in *The House of Hidden Mothers*(2015) talks about the condition of Mala who becomes the surrogate leaves behind what she never wanted and move ahead with the surrogacy which she chooses with the consent of her husband Ram. Shyama’s and Mala’s family doesn’t know about the surrogacy as it remains the stereotypical notion among the parents. “She had insisted on keeping their IVF a secret from her parents for the last four years, so why choose to tell Sita now when it wasn’t going to happen?” (44) In-Vitro Fertilization is a kind of injection which is injected in surrogate which carries the sperm of the intended father. When the woman has some complexities during pregnancy which can be either regarding the ovum, the undeveloped egg or in fertilization then the woman takes the help of surrogate. Assisted reproductive technology which Varada Madge in “Infertility, Women and Assisted reproductive Technologies: An Exploratory

Study in Pune, India” explains about its methods and complications. But at the same time it’s helping women to be independent and even helping the couple who wants to have child but are unable to have because of the medical complexities.

“ There are several procedures that fall under this category, but for the purpose of this study there are following methods:

1. Intra-Utrine Insemination(IUI) which is the introduction of semen into vagina or cervix of a female. IUI is a treatment that is usually carried out for male sub-fertility.
2. In-Viro Fertilisation (IVF) which involves collecting eggs and sperm and placing them in laboratory dish for fertilization. Later, the embryos are transferred into the uterus where implantation and pregnancy will hopefully occur, as in normal pregnancy.
3. Intra-cytoplasmic Sperm Injection(ICSI). A single sperm is directly injected into each egg. ICSI is carried out when the man has an extremely low sperm count” (5).

These procedures have lot of risks involved, but might sound simple. Due to the hyper stimulation of the ovaries during IVF

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increases the risk of ectopic pregnancy, in which the fetus develops outside the uterus usually in fallopian tube. With all risks in pregnancy a woman tries to give birth to a child. “ ART, they not only get gift of a longed-for child, but also know that their money is going to help the woman who has given a new life to them” (92). Commercial surrogacy nowadays is a great business and it’s increasing like a plague with all the risk involved. Preeti Nayak in “ The Three Ms of Commercial Surrogacy in India Mother, Money and Medical Market” (2014) explains the risks of surrogacy “ along with the possible physiological harm as a direct outcome of the drugs and medical procedures, the very context and factors ‘pushing’ a woman into surrogacy arrangement also constitute risks for her” (6).

Mostly surrogate comes from the rural areas in need of money they have reasons like their husband doesn’t earn, they want to send their children to school, they want to make their house and there are women whose in-laws are involved so that they can have money. Even Sayal explicates in the novel that “ it’s bit dodgy, isn’t it? What about the women’s right to choose, own her own body and all that? It’s India, darling. And most of these women are from rural areas” (93). Different narratives of surrogates explain varied conditions from which they go through and finally give away the child with which they create a

bound while making it knowingly for others. J. Warner in “Outsourced Womb” (2008) enlightens that the surrogates are willing to carry for the sake of their own children. “Indeed one of the ways that surrogacy survives here (US) is under cover of the fiction that the women who bear other women’s babies do so not for the money-which would be degrading-but because they love to be pregnant”. Surrogacy is boon for the women working in houses for 12 hours a day, women who labour everyday with her husband but paid less comparatively and women who are illiterate cannot go out for good jobs tries to help the needful couple to make their children’s future. As one of the surrogate woman explains herself in Sayal’s novel she says

“this is my third time here, one woman with an enormous golden nose piercing told the camera. It is not allowed to give more than three babies so I feel sad I cannot come again. Dr. Passi is so kind to us. And after this baby, my own three children will be safe for the rest of their lives” (95).

Surrogates who help the other women to become mother is a kind of precious gift which they adore throughout life. In every country there is a child of India which becomes the transnational surrogacy as mostly couples prefer Indian mothers

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because they are more fertile and easily accessible for the client parents. Sharmila Rudrappa in *Discounted Life The Price of Global Surrogacy in India* (2015) examines that Surrogacy is the happiness filled in the life of couples who really needs the child. She discusses various cases of surrogates who have a great bond with the intended parents, inspite signing the procedure that after the child birth there will be no contact of the mother with the child and their parents to avoid the further complexities.

“Adrinne Arieff, a thirty-six-year-old marketing specialist in San Francisco and author of a book on surrogacy, says that when she first met her Gujarati surrogate mother, Vaina, who birthed twins for her, Arieff wanted them to operate as social equals engaging in a business transaction. But when she returned for the delivery of the twins, the business relationship transitioned into something more. She says we’d do things like braid each other’s hair, do each other’s makeup. We don’t speak the same language so the relationship was based on these basic human principles and exchanges” (143).

Margret Atwood in *The Testaments* (2019), explains about the Genealogical Archives, which gives the record of the relation of the surrogate with her child. “It’s essential to

record who is related to whom, both officially and in fact: due to the Handmaid system, a couple’s child may not be biologically related to the elite mother or even to the official father, for a desperate Handmaid is likely to seek impregnation however she may. It is our business to inform ourselves, since incest must be prevented: there are enough Unbabies already” (35). This is an attempt to keep the record because the baby delivered by the Offred was Nicole which was sent out of the Gilead to be safe. In Gilead every other women is worth of something or the other, although the culture is that of women but no one has the power of freedom but being suppressed by the other women. This can be seen through the speech of the Aunt explaining the other women about her strength. “She said I was shirking my duty, and any girl who’d been gifted with a woman’s body was obligated to offer this body up in holy sacrifice to God and for the glory of Gilead and mankind, and also to fulfill the function that such bodies had inherited from the moment of creation, and that was nature’s law”(246).

Therefore, both the novels encountered the contours of poststructuralist female characters reborn as new being with the power to fight the rights of their body. The question which still lingers is that whether the immolation of women’s body by unveiling the market set for objectifying body will continue to rule or would change?

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