
UNIT 2 THE LABOURING BODY

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Structure

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

Defining women by their embodied capacity for 'reproduction' and as 'maternal bodies' is evident even today; therefore, many the young women are deprived of various prestigious roles within prestigious professions like medicine and other such careers (Gatrell,2008). With this background, the unit will focus on explaining the relationship between women's reproductive bodies and women's productive work, which encompass both unpaid and paid labour. The notion of the woman's body is central to sociological and feminist analysis of power relations and remains a negotiated field of power between men and women in the society (Gatrell, 2008). This means that women in the labour room, in the home, within the workplace or anywhere in the society are primarily defined and recognized by their reproductive characteristics. Based on this notion, woman's reproductive labour ends up determining her positioning in the labour market and society at large. Therefore, women's embodied position as 'a mother' often emphasises the social significance of the 'maternal body' and 'reproduction of labour' for women, society and the labour market. Women's labour market choices are tightly tied up with the boundaries of home and unremunerated unpaid reproductive labour. With this backdrop, the present unit aims at analysing

the interface between women's labour of reproduction and the positioning of woman's body in the home and the labour market. We will attempt to do this by looking at the relationships between embodiment and labour, reproduction and production.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss and explain the concepts of the labouring body;
- Describe different forms of labouring bodies as gendered beings in relation to public and private domains; and
- Critically analyse dilemmas associated with the female productive body across class, caste, and occupation.

2.3 UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S EMBODIMENT AND LABOUR

2.3.1 The Female Body as the Basis of Feminist Debate

Feminists have often questioned the understanding of female body as 'biologically given' in the analysis of different forms of productive, reproductive, sexualised, and violated bodies. This understanding of the female body from a biological-essentialist position makes female bodies vulnerable to oppressive power in society. Therefore, the socio-cultural construction of the woman's body forms the basis of various debates within feminism as it relates power, patriarchy, and the female body within spheres of reproduction and production. Women's embodied labour of reproduction – in other words, the role of mother, nurturer and caregiver experienced and lived through her body is similar to Young's conceptualisation of "lived bodily experience" (Young, 2005, p.5, cited in Gatrell, 2008, p. 9). All women live with their reproductive body and engage in activities such as going out to work, carrying out domestic chores, giving birth to children and playing the role of mother or nurturer. These exemplify the lived experiences of women's embodied labour, and simultaneously shape society's attitude towards them (Gatrell, 2008). Hence, it can be said that all forms of labour are gendered and equally embodied in nature. This idea can be used to understand the concept of the labouring body while critiquing the biological differences between female and male.

Feminists conceptualise women's bodies as socially constructed. Women's labour in the domestic and work domains is devalued. Social norms of being a female or a male get inscribed within the body. This shapes woman's and man's understanding of the experience of the lived body in society. For instance, the social construction of the female body includes the practice of child-bearing, care, and nurture that produce a particular form of

subjective experience for women towards work. This embodied experience of the female body is significant in the discussion of labour. It raises the question: 'Which body matters for what kind of work?'. Therefore, the discussion of the labouring body cannot be dealt with in isolation without looking at its interface with the female biological ability to give birth and to become a mother. Discussion of female labour in the context of reproduction makes us analyse women's subjective embodiment as part of the private domain, which in turn limits women's access to paid labour. Labouring bodies are gendered in nature as also socially constructed. This implies that society expects some specialised tasks or performance from women to prove their bodies are both able and normal. In particular, the 'reproductive female body' is central to our understanding of the normalized female body and women's labour.

2.3.2 The Reproductive Female Body vs. The Labouring Female Body

The sociological enquiry about the body began in the 1960s with the emergence of the women's liberation movement. Feminist theorists of the first and second waves started questioning the binary representations of the body, i.e., the body is aligned with women and the mind is aligned with men in a hierarchical way. They saw this as leading to a conceptualisation of the woman's body as a site of suffering (Jeanes et al, 2011). The female body, due to its features of menstruation, childbirth, and lactation was perceived to have limited access in terms of gaining equality in all spheres of life. Feminists of this tradition started questioning the negative image of the body. They focused on questions such as: the constitution of the labouring body and the way in which the female labouring body is been formed and managed by structures of economy, culture, and social norms which limit the female body to only one role- that of reproduction.

On the other hand, 'the reproductive female body' is considered as an obstruction in the arena of paid work. Women's constant negotiation and struggle to perform forms a significant part of women's embodiment in feminist analysis. All women come across this form of marginalisation as 'women' with their first move into the labour market. Reproduction may lead to various forms of constraints in terms of women exercising their choice to work. In contrast, the notion of the "reproductive female body" is viewed as normative within the family, but not valued as a productive labouring body. Women's continuous conflict with their bodies reflects the inherent dilemma of the labouring body in the family vis-à-vis the work sphere. Further, the aspect of the 'productive female body' demands a compromise of the female reproductive body in the workplace. In the current scenario, motherhood is prioritised through health professionals, media, and government campaigns. You might have seen the recent advertisement in television – which emphasises that every child should be

fed mother's milk till first 6 months of life. It reemphasises the importance of the reproductive body for women through prioritizing the aspect of compulsory breast feeding. However, the requirements of breast feeding are different (compulsory lactation room), and hardly accepted within the notion of the productive body in various work cultures. This contradiction demands redefinition of reproductive and productive work in relation to women's body and bodily processes, and not in relation to gender identification or socially expected behavior. The constraints associated with a woman's body are important and need to be located within the discussion on labouring body and paid work. As quoted by Gatrell, "notions of leakage and seepage are especially relevant to my discussions of women's paid work because women's propensity to 'leak' has been seen to signify women's 'otherness', their 'inherent lack of control of [their] bodies' and consequently of themselves" (Shildrick, 1997, p. 34, cited in Gatrell, 2008). Women's labour is a representation of their bodies in different forms and ways; hence understanding bodily functions and constraints can enhance women's subject position in the workplace. For women, the reproductive body and the labouring body can be interchangeably used as both the aspects refer to the intricate relationship between female body and un-paid labour.

Check Your Progress:

Define female embodiment. Give an example of embodiment.

2.4 POSITIONING WOMEN'S BODIES IN NON-WORK PROCESSES

As background to this discussion, we will set out in more detail the aims of this unit relating to the labour of love and reproduction, the positioning of women's bodies within the labour market, and carry out an analysis of the labour market in relation to different forms of the female body such as the maternal body, the productive body, and the reproductive body. Here, **Judith Butler's** work is important as it tries to understand women's work through the material conception of women's embodied experience. As you have seen in Unit 3, Block 4 in Course MWG-001 and Unit 4 , Block 1 of this course, Butler speaks of gender in terms of performativity. In a similar way, women are socialised to perform certain roles in everyday life, in turn symbolise with certain spheres and performances. The female labouring body gets firming through socially constructed practices followed in spheres of domestic work and labour market (see Gatrell, 2008, p.10).

Work both in paid and unpaid form is central to women's existence and embodiment. According to **Meenakshi Thapan**, women's work is central to their definition in the society, governs their relationship with others, and becomes an instrument to enhance their quality of life. If we take an everyday life perspective to analyse women's labour in a day, it will reflect how a woman uses her body to perform wide ranging work starting with domestic labour to paid work, and to maintain social relationships with the community. Within this wide-ranging conception of labour, more often they use their bodies to experience subordination, express resistance to patriarchal norms, and exercise choice within a day (Thapan, 2009, p.132). **Glucksmann** describes pregnancy as a non-work process as it is natural to the notion of good motherhood and the maternal body (cited in Gatrell). Therefore, in this section we will look at women's experience of their own subjective bodies in a variety of activities, which are described as 'non-work processes' by the society.

2.4.1 The Symbolisation of Biological Reproduction

The representation of biological reproduction through various symbols and metaphors is central to analysing men's work vis-à-vis women's work. The symbolisation of reproduction which is expressed through terms like 'seed' and 'earth' gives a social definition to the woman's body and associated labour. **Leela Dube** (1986) writes that in parts of northern and central India, the process of biological reproduction is often explained through words such as 'seed'. This emphasises the significance of the father's role, which is essential for the child's identity and survival. The seed gives life to a child through the father's blood. The earth, on the other hand, symbolises the womb and specifies various roles of the mother as a nurturer. The womb receives the seed and provides warmth and nourishment for the growth of the fetus. Within the sphere of reproduction, the woman's role and her body are emphasised as passive agents and the existence of her body is undermined. A similar expression of women's labour can be seen in Sanskrit texts and ancient epics like the *Mahabharata*. In *Narada Smriti*, the quality and responsibility of a man are expressed in the following manner;

Women are created for offspring; a woman is the field and a man is the possessor of the seed; the field should be given to him who possesses the seed; a man without the seed does not deserve a girl (Pandey, 1976, cited in Dube, 1986, p. 24).

The above quote describes the female body as an instrument for procreation in creating the offspring of the man. Therefore, the child bears relation to the father's blood and identifies herself/himself with patrilineal kinfolds or the male line of descent. The main responsibility of a man is to become the head of the household and perpetuate the name of the family through male offspring. Within family and marriage, the role of a woman is subordinated

under patriarchy. A similar expression of female and male labour is found among various groups across tribe, caste, and ethnicity. Dube writes that among the Gond women, the ideology of seed and earth and the belief attached to it are firmly and expressed through the usage of particular phrases or proverbs. Delay in menstruation depicts the inability of the woman's body to perform its reproductive labour in future. Several metaphors have been used in rural India depicting the significance of women's wombs which simultaneously defines the use of women's bodies in relation to reproductive labour. In the study of *Caste and Kinship of Central India*, Mayer remarks on similar illustrations such as, 'The mother only provides the place for the fetus to grow' (Dube, 1986, p. 28). In Andhra Pradesh, the word *Vittanamis* used to describe or refer to man's contribution in procreation (Dube, 1986, p.29). In various parts of India, such metaphors of seed and earth are used to symbolise the differential role of women and men in procreation and specify the significance of female body parts and processes within reproduction as well. Veena Das's work, *Masks and Faces: An Essay on Punjabi Kinship* (1976) analyses the role of mother's blood in procreation.

'The seed grows into a child in the mother's womb. The bones of the child are formed by the semen and the blood is formed by the mother's blood. That is why menstruation is said to cease in a pregnant woman' (cited in Dube, 1986, p.30).

The above statement suggests the use of female body (blood) for the growth of the child. It also points to a hierarchical relationship or power inequality existing between the mother and the father while bringing up the child. These references, infused in the common consciousness of people, become tools for socialising women into reproduction of a specific type of labour.

The symbolisation of female body in the process of reproduction depicts a 'relationship of hierarchy' between her body and the reproduction of labour. The implications of this symbolisation impact women's access to paid employment and specify the nature of relationship between the two sexes and their relative positions in the society. These reference points reemphasise the distinction between nature and culture and push the female body further into the domain of nature. Nature is passive; hence the female body is often described as a passive entity in the sphere of reproduction.

These connections between the female body, nature and labour have two major implications for women's unpaid labour. Firstly, symbolisation expresses the essentially unequal relationship, and secondly, metaphors are used by culture or men to undermine women's contribution and significance in biological reproduction (Dube, 1986). Further, the physiological connection between mother and the child places upon the mother a moral obligation

that results in denial of access to other forms of paid employment. For example, a child's dependence on mother's milk constrains her and thus 'going out leaving her baby during lactation' leads to negative reactions. She is perceived as neglecting her moral and natural duties. When a woman's body is linked with the earth, it essentialises women's role in the society and her capability to bear a child with pain. Women's labour in reproduction embodies subjective experiences like pain, emotion, and morality; however these are never valued in the childbirth process. The body of a woman is never situated equally with the body of a man in terms of her contribution toward childbirth, on the contrary, her reproductive labour is invisible and neglected within the private sphere. This form of asymmetrical relationship within the private has its replications in the public domain as well.

According to Dube, the significant aspect of symbolism is how the bodies of two partners are located in the process of reproduction that implicates both the seed and field belonging to the man. She argues that by equating women's body with the earth and man's semen with the seed, we can draw simile metaphor between the process of reproduction and the process of production, in which rights over the crop always remain with the man and not with the women. In general, the man's control over the woman's body allows him to exercise control over women's labour in other forms of productive activities like agriculture, resource management and so on. Therefore, it is not surprising to see women as wage labourers and a flexible workforce in paid occupations. The understanding of social construction of the female body and labour as 'passive and supportive to man's labour' is sustained even though a woman earns her living through paid labour. Now, let us examine the nature of unpaid labour, particularly in the context of motherhood.

2.4.2 Women and Motherhood: Emancipatory or Constraining

Possessing a female body implies that a woman not only performs work outside the household but also takes on responsibilities associated with childbearing. We can see a dilemma between women's desire for paid work and independence, and submission of their selves and bodies to the culture of unpaid work. In general, it is women's labour that constructs their embodied identities as women. Thapan (2009) discusses issues like the culture of 'son preference' as central to women's labour. For example, women who cannot bear children especially a son feel incomplete and useless. In this connection, women's bodies are not only considered as disabled by the society but also a source of social shame and dishonour for the family. The following example from Thapan's book, 'Living the Body' (2009) aptly illustrates the above points. *Poolwati is mother of three daughters. She seems to be a cheerful woman, but she looks unhappy when the*

discussion centered on childbearing. She says, no one in the society is allowing me to live as the society expects a boy child from me. It is important to have sons as they continue to carry the family name and gives emotional support to the parents during old age. In her saying, she expresses her bodily incapacity to bear a son, thus this is implicating the notion of 'failing reproductive labour' to maintain the family name and honour in the society (Thapan, p. 134).

It is perceived that the failure of women's embodied labour in meeting the social obligations (desire for a son) leads towards devaluing her subjective self and the body. Women's labour is based on social conditions, hence easily underplayed by the family and community at large. Let us read the story of another woman who has used her productive body as medium to exercise freedom and agency in the society.

Sangeeta is in her thirties, expecting her first child after twelve years of marriage. As she narrated, in all these years she has countered her husband and in-laws's actions and words with regard to her childlessness. Apart from her paid labour, she equally contributes intensive and heavy work as part of embodied labour. She says, her husband is "dependent upon me and will remember me proudly after my death". Men are hungry for women's body. In this connection, she made a distinction between sexual desire and female labouring body. Men exercise power and dominate women by using women's bodies in the execution of socially accepted form of labour, which often not considered as a form of domination by the society (Thapan, p. 136).

The female body is seen as a tool to carry out reproductive labour and becomes instrumental in women's oppression. Sometimes, the same body is used by women themselves for their survival against patriarchy. According to Thapan, women's endless contribution towards domestic work can be simultaneously oppressive and liberating. The expression of Sangeeta's anger and pain is not exclusively about her passivity, but an expression of her strength. She was happy that she could pay for her infertility treatment and capable of managing both household work and domestic paid work simultaneously. Here, Sangeeta carries her 'reproductive body' and uses it for her survival and honour within the family.

The concept of the maternal body exists across classes. In contemporary times, daily 'soaps'(television serials) represent the social construction of the female labouring body to be capable of doing heavy and soft work within the household. Society accepts and appreciates the female body which is capable of doing heavy tasks as it shows physical strength of a woman within the family. The paradox is that the same female body gets disqualified to participate in hard tasks like construction, mining, mechanical engineering and driving, which entails paid labour in the public domain. We

can draw the inference that the division between soft and heavy work is not so much related to the body, but contingent upon the separation between paid labour in the public sphere and unpaid labour in private sphere. Like Sangeeta, many other women use their labouring bodies as sources of survival within the family and in the community.

While we talk about reproductive labour, the relationship between women's bodies, work, and mechanisms of fertility control needs to be discussed. Women's decision-making for reproductive choice is a significant indicator of their access to different forms of work. However, their choice is deeply embedded in social situations. For example, men's opposition to vasectomy is accepted in the society as they bear the burden of paid work. According to Thapan, "women are protective of their husbands who are in need of protection; they require 'healthy' bodies for heavy work" (p.141). There is an inherent understanding that men need healthy bodies to perform heavy work. Hence, men should be free from any pain and discomforts. Further, decisions with regard to controlling female fertility rest with men and are imposed upon the female body. Patriarchy draws an inherent relationship between the female body and its capacity to perform only soft tasks, even though it is capable of bearing health risks which are caused due to extraneous factors like sterilisation. The idea of having a healthy body is never attached to the reproductive female bodies. It is seen that men often impose sterilisation upon women for the following reasons:

- I) The labour of reproduction and the labour of love are always associated with the female body, which is strong enough to bear pain and risk; and
- II) Concepts like the healthy male body, and heavy work are symbiotically related to and reinforce each other.

A series of case analyses mentioned by Thapan(2009) illustrates the above points. In one of the case analysis, *Jeena* wanted to control her fertility and had an abortion and finally an operation. She justified her action by stating that men do not undergo the surgery as their work is heavy. Here, the male reproductive body is perceived to be weak, therefore, women wish to protect their husbands' bodies from any form of damage. Thus, they take decision on their reproductive choices. They project their bodies as strong and capable enough to do hard manual and household work and also bear pain. In all these examples, we can see the differential representation of gendered bodies, i.e., the female labouring body as 'strong' to carry out heavy reproductive labour vis-à-vis the male body as weak in taking hazards related to reproductive matters. This way of managing the reproductive female body is only a reflection of the patriarchal management of female reproductive and productive labour in a hierarchical relation.

Handy Harcourt (2009) asks the question: 'Where is the male reproductive body?' Within the population and development discourse, discussions on the

non-maternal body or male reproductive body were completely silent. In the Cairo Programme of Action, 1994, men were encouraged to take responsibilities and participate in reproduction related matters while accepting their social role as fathers. According to Harcourt, the family planning agenda in the post-Cairo period which talks about men's reproductive labour and participation at the level of awareness raising, however, fails to put male reproductive bodies under the scanner. It is paradoxical that male bodies are discussed as 'productive bodies' in relation to their roles as workers and as soldiers, but not as fathers, husbands, and lovers. The gender and development discourse, feminist debates and other international initiatives like the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) have hardly actualised the concept of the 'male reproductive body' into programmes of action. A lack of discussion and debates on male reproductive bodies suggest that embodied reproductive bodies mainly refer to female labour.

Check Your Progress:

Observe some of the women in your family or neighbourhood and try to find out the extent of unpaid labour they perform on an average day. Write a note and compare it with the other students at your Study Centre/through the online discussion forum.

2.5 WOMEN AND PRODUCTIVE BODIES

In this section we will analyse women's labouring body in relation to the labour market. Specifically it will explore the constraints or challenges faced by women when they compete with men in the labour market.

2.5.1 The Female Body and the Global Labour Market

As more and more women joined the labour force, various types of questions surfaced within feminist discourse. In this section; we will attempt to answer the following questions: i) why does the labour market reflect gender segregation? ii) why do women make negotiations between their productive and caring bodies?

The labour market and workplace grew on the structural inequality between the home and the work sphere in both the mind and consciousness. For women, productive labour is perceived to be an extension of their home sphere whereas, for men, reproductive sphere is perceived to be a limiting sphere of action. In 1980s and 1990s, we saw millions of women entering into emerging global labour markets which certainly had set the trend towards viewing the 'female productive body' as a sustainable source of

flexible, docile and cheap labour (Wichterich 2000, cited in Harcourt, 2009). This process of feminisation of labour is growing in tandem with the informalisation of labour market. Both these processes are related and emphasised the fact that female productive bodies are still undermined in the labour market in various ways.

Let us discuss the embodied experiences of women who participate in productive and caring work as well. Most of these women work in the informal economy and are often invisible in the analysis of market and economic growth. As Harcourt (2009) stated, it is important to answer the question of how productive and care work overlap with each other in lives of women and create new forms of relationship. In this context, she argues that the mainstream analysis of the market economy needs to include the stress and strains associated with new roles of women in relation to their productive bodies. For example, toys sewn by women's hand in Chinese factories, African and South-east Asian women's efforts to provide cut flowers and fruits to global super markets and Asian women in sweat shops and other import companies stitching cheap clothes and shoes making fancy jewellery for the world around are thus far invisible in the analysis of the productive labouring body. Therefore, the connections between women's embodied lives in these invisible forms of labour with the changing socio-economic life style of the middle class need to be drawn upon and discussed in the context of gender analysis of the labouring body. Balancing between the productive and family work by the middle class and poor women is of serious concern to feminists, as the female body is caught between the spheres of production and reproduction. As Gita Sen argued, "women are in the crossroad between production and reproduction" (cited in Harcourt, 2009, p.71; quoted by Kabeer, 2007, p.9).

Hence, it is important to unravel the interconnections between women's productive bodies and other aspects like work place harassment, working hours, nature of work, and informalisation of female labour. Paid labour is not necessarily always emancipating for all women across caste, class, and occupation. It is equally important to reflect on the invisible side of women's productive bodies wherein women are engaged in cheap labour and the relationship between women and the nature of work both paid and unpaid.

2.5.2 Negotiating with the Labour Market

As we discussed in the preceding section, the labour market has an inbuilt character of gender segregation. Similarly, other social embodiments like marriage, class, and caste which are associated with the female productive body determine/deny her access to a particular job. Young unmarried women have better chances of joining occupations of their own choice than married women. In her work on *globalisation, marriage, and masculinities*, Naila Kabeer has stated that younger women entering the labour market are likely to benefit as economic independence gives them a sense of control

over their lives and reproductive bodies. However, married women joining the labour market are likely to be constantly on guard as they negotiate time, labour, and the nature of work to manage their reproductive roles along with the paid work. In this situation, the female productive body comes under double suppression, i.e., suppression from family and the work sphere as well. Suppression from the family manifests in different ways such as male resistance to accept domestic responsibilities, marriage breakdown, excessive alcoholism, higher rate of suicide, and domestic violence (cited in Harcourt, p.75). Male productive bodies are reluctant to take on family responsibilities with a view to sustain their identity and dominance, and on the other hand, the female body takes the burden of working long hours to manage both paid and unpaid responsibilities as a matter of natural duty.

In the past decades, feminists like **Jane Freedman, Mariarosa, Dalla Costa** and other feminists have demanded wages for housework while referring to the theoretical debate of the Marxist theory of capitalism. They argue that women's housework like care work, childbearing, and nurturing enabled the capitalist system to sustain and expand. Therefore, the household labour is necessary for the production of surplus, reproduction of labour, and continuance of the whole capitalist system (Freedman, 2001, p.53). This analysis signifies the relationship between women's labour and economic production in the society. However, these analyses fail to capture the aspect of women's embodied lives in a particular socio-cultural setup and their everyday struggle to balancing the spheres of production and reproduction. It is not always possible for a woman to have access to work of her choice. Women's access to a particular form of work gives them self-esteem and a sense of social and material empowerment in their everyday lives. Let us take another case study from Meenakshi Thapan's work which brings out the connections between women's paid and unpaid work and factors like caste, class and poverty.

Premwati who hails from Haryana. She was married in quite young age and had a daughter within two years of her marriage. Initially, her husband didn't allow her to work outside the home in the name of family honour. She wanted to be engaged in a job to organize the dowry amount for her five daughters. Additionally, she didn't want to work as domestic labour because of the association of caste impurity with the occupation. For her, the factory work was more suitable because she felt the factory space is detached from any caste identity. Premawati's lack of freedom to take up paid work consequently increased her burden of physical labour and she gave birth to seven children. After she had her family planning operation, she continued to do family work along side paid work as she considered work is crucial to women's existence (Thapan, p. 143).

In this case, the emphasis is on the notion of productive body, which every woman recourse to it for survival. Often, women negotiate with a particular work out of compulsion because every social situation is not under the control of every woman. Here, nature of paid work may not be emancipatory for the woman, but her earning capacity as paid worker saves her in economic crisis.

Similarly, stresses and strains of factory work, inappropriate working time, and working place do not always address the specific needs of the female body both in the formal and informal economy. The amount of physical strains that women experience in carrying out both household and paid work often leads to ill health. The existing gender hierarchies within the labour market have certain invisible implications for female bodies. Women who work in export firms and other private companies suffer due to low wages, lack of flexi-work hours, sexual harassment, long working hours, and so on. As Harcourt points out, additional problems of the female productive body are associated with lack of security during night, restricted toilet breaks, and mothers not having adequate child care facilities. For single women, devaluation of their social status is an issue of serious concern. For instance, women working in call centres doing night shifts are continuously viewed as women of loose character by the society.

Reena Patel's (2011) recent study, *Working the Night Shift*, reflects the construction of the female productive/liberated body in relation to time and space. In Dhaka (Bangladesh) migrant women who go out to work in export-oriented factories often experience hostility, abuse and violence during the night. The street and factory both become sites of women's bodily violence at night. Patel argues that space and time construct the gendered nature of the labouring body; however, women working in night shifts have challenged the traditional understanding that women are safe at home. Working at night can be seen as an evolving strategy for women to assert the notion of productive yet liberated bodies in the discourse of the global economy and existing patriarchy. When women embody a productive body, they come under surveillance and public scrutiny by various stakeholders. For example, when women's productive bodies are depicted in films, they are always shown in supportive roles like private secretaries, receptionists, and as wives. However, several recent films in India depict female productive bodies as 'bold women' and simultaneously their bodies and lives are negatively portrayed. These representations of female bodies can also be seen in other domains of public life.

2.5.3 Women in New Challenging Roles

According to Gatrell, within professions and family business, very few women have taken influential and decision-making roles. The author quotes Puwar (2004) who describes women who invade “traditionally male ‘spaces’ such as the House of Commons and the corporate boardrooms, thereby manifesting the ‘troubled dream’ of the future in the nineteenth century” (p, 116). The image given below describes the fear of the unseen, i.e., the dream of a troubled future which challenges the ‘angelic’ role of women within the household while invading male dominated spaces in politics and professions. Gatrell stated that when women encroach upon the male dominated arenas in the labour market, they come under severe scrutiny. Hence, women experience both isolation and pressure from the surroundings and they are compelled to comply with male embodied norms in the workplace. The pictorial representation here, not only communicates that home is the ideal place for women but also gives a sense of threat to male dominance. These interpretations and symbolisations relating work with women’s bodies have had an adverse impact on women’s careers and professional development in contemporary times.



“THE ANGEL IN ‘THE HOUSE;’” OR, THE RESULT OF FEMALE SUFFRAGE
(A Troubled Dream of the Future)

(Reproduced from the original cartoon featured in Punch magazine - image supplied by Lancaster University Library, adapted from Gatrell,p.102).

Similarly, in areas of family business, small-scale industries and agriculture, the division between women's paid and unpaid work gets blurred and women's contribution to work is further undermined and devalued. Within family businesses, women's contribution is hardly ever acknowledged. In the formal domain of work, women are not only compromised on equal pay, but also sometimes offered the jobs which are not preferred by men. For example, in recent years, marketing jobs have become available for women in the management sector since men opt for financial marketing. Women who work in the male dominated spheres eventually adapt themselves to masculine norms and the organisational culture of management. Women face uncomfortable consequences when they occupy jobs which are predominantly associated with the male body. Similarly, women in senior roles face exclusion and isolation when they cross boundaries of the kinds of work associated with the notion of maternal body (Gatrell, 2008).

2.5.4 The Maternal Body and The Productive Body: Social Misconceptions

As we have discussed earlier, women's productive and reproductive roles are intrinsically related. Across societies, women suffer from the misconception that maternal bodies are not capable of carrying out productive work. Gatrell has tried to explore some social perceptions about the processes associated with the maternal body. She argues that the Anglo-American society has traditionally associated women with norms of heterosexuality, wifehood, and homemaking. Hence, women's engagement with reproductive labour and men's association with productive labour continue to expand the increasing gender division of labour. Similarly, the labour market follows the model of gender stereotyping and encourages women to continue their reproductive roles against accepting productive roles. Misconceptions such as women being non-committed unreliable workers and unsuitable for senior positions in the labour market still persist. In fear of challenging/disrupting the social norms, women rarely inhabit the sphere which is traditionally associated with the male body.

Another perception is employers' fear of women's absence from work due to pregnancy. Organisations see pregnancy as an embodied awkward condition that puts women in a disadvantageous position to work. There are a very few women in senior and executive positions whose bodies at the beginning make them out for the competition. Many employers associate the female pregnant body with lowered employee commitment, instability, ill health, workplace and absence (EOC 2005a, cited in Gatrell, p. 132). Likewise, the period of menstruation is equated with unstable moods and unpredictable behavior. Therefore, in the productive sphere, women's reproductive functions have not been addressed or been an issue of concern in the labour market. We can see that reproductive bodies have taken an insignificant position to survive productive female body in the labour market.

Activity:

Does the labour market differentiate between the female and male productive body? Use examples from films, books, reports, and your own experience, and collect case note from different individuals. Analyze the case notes using the concepts and ideas you have learnt in this unit.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit discusses the association between women's embodied labour and their body and the labour market. It deals with the concept of women's embodiment in relation to different forms of labouring bodies and explains how women experience their transition from the maternal body to the productive body. Further, it describes different socio-economic, and cultural contexts which enable and constrain women to occupy various types of labouring bodies. The unit raises some important concerns with regard to the invisible challenges associated with women's productive bodies and how the reproductive body gets submerged under the productive body. It draws attention to a neglected field within the discourse of gender, development, and the labour market.

2.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) All work is gendered in nature. Discuss this statement from a feminist perspective.
- 2) How does the discussion on the labouring body challenge the principle of biological essentialism? Discuss with suitable examples.
- 3) How does the concept of labour differ in relation to the female body?
- 4) Critically analyse the relationship between the labouring body and the labour market.

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