

Embeddedness and Freedom: The Female Body and Gendered Critique of Reality

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Abstract:

This paper investigates how the female body in the context of cosmology and indigenous knowledge in India is constructed by and embedded in the surrounding socio-somatic relationships, and how it is made to act as to ensure reproduction and well-being of the body-persons that are related to her. The processes of socio-somatic interactions mediated by female bodies are what ensure the reproduction of this world and the cycle of birth and death (*saPsÁra*). It is considered that the feminine body has the special faculty of being the site of mediation of *Ḍakti*, by the virtue of which a female body-person is able to give birth, menstruate and breast-feed, and is also given the role of cooking and feeding the family, including ancestors, to ensure reproduction of the family line.

Although such aspects of the feminine body-person are indeed important, this paper argues that there is another significant aspect of femininity in India. This aspect is related to a value found in some of the ritual play among unmarried girls in Odisha and in the discourse of nostalgia among married women regarding their childhood. Play of unmarried girls suggests their erotic pursuit of link with the realm of the sacred and the transcendental through their femininity, which leads to a gendered critique of reality. It contains the potentiality of the freedom of the self/soul from the limitations and constraints imposed by the body and from the social ties that bind the living being to this world.