

**FAMILY AND MARRIAGE: IS SHE COMMODIFIED?**

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**ABSTRACT**

The commodification of women has long been followed in the society all over the world. It is a common practice that prevails in society across various institutions, beliefs and even cultural norms. In this paper we shall discuss about the institution of marriage and family and how they commodify women. Families that are considered to be the most basic unit of a society is where the commodification of a female starts from the time of its birth till its death, also marriage is something that helps in creating a family: it's an institution that leads to family and forming a society with number of families. This paper mainly points out about how women are objectified/commodified, how they're forced to believe or made to believe that they're just a object and not a person as same as a man. In this misogynistic world, a female whether a child, adult or any women are considered fragile, made believe to be very brittle from a very young age in their families. This article shall also weighs upon the societal norms that commodify her and how she overcomes it in the current feminist society, also shall talk about various case studies regarding her exploitation in these institutions of marriage and family.

In my opinion, women have been commodified in every stratum of this society starting with the family. With such patriarchal notions and practices, imbibed from the beginning of one's life, the society cannot progress much in terms of 'morality' in its actual sense. This commodification should be scraped up from the bottom that is established within our own families and marriage, with a change that starts from us where a female is equal to a male in all aspects be it mentally physically or anything where there is no comparison or prejudice over anybody.

Capitalist, patriarchal society is structured around the sexual division of labor, separating "men's" and "women's" work in order to establish that men's work is worth more than women's. Men's work is related to production (what is sold on the market), while women's work is a reproductive one (the production of human beings and relationships). Representations of the male and female identities are dual and hierarchical, as is the association of men with culture, and women with nature<sup>1</sup>. This led to the latter suppression of women in the households doing

their chores. But the question that arises again is that is doing chores not considered to be work, is it considered to be unpaid domestic labor? When this question is answered we may know the answer of whether women are considered to be a commodity or not; if they can do their household chores and taking care of their children ,why can't they work in this society where their value is undermined?<sup>1</sup>

### **COMMODIFICATION AND WOMEN**

In Marxist terms, commodification refers to the process of assigning market value to goods or services that previously existed outside of the market<sup>2</sup>. For the economist, commodities simply are certain things and rights to things are produced, exist, and can be seen to circulate through the economic system as they are being exchanged for other things, usually in exchange for money. This view, of course, frames the commonsensical definition of a commodity: an item with use value that also has exchange value. From a cultural perspective, the production of commodities is also a cultural and cognitive process: commodities must be not only produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing. Out of the total range of things available in a society, only some of them are considered appropriate for marking as commodities.

Moreover, the same thing may be treated as a commodity at one time and not at another. And finally, the same thing may, at the same time, be seen as a commodity by one person and as something else by another. Such shifts and differences in whether and when a thing is a commodity reveal a moral economy that stands behind the objective economy of visible transactions<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> World March of Women, The world is not a commodity! And neither are women! , CADTM COMMITTEE FOR THE ABOLITION OF ILLEGITIMATE DEB, (Dec. 8, 2014), <https://www.cadtm.org/the-world-is-not-a-commodity-and%20>.

<sup>2</sup> The fetishism of commodities and the secret thereof. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. R Tucker, pp. 319–29. New York: Norton. 2nd Ed.

<sup>3</sup> Kopytoff, Igor (1986), “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in A. Appadurai (Ed.), *the Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 64-92.

Women have historically been and still are considered the property of men and as such, are often treated as commodities. Commoditization theory contends that a human being can be transformed into a commodity when they become a unit under the control of another. The commoditized person is used to achieve the commoditizers' objectives and is stripped of free will, self-determination and self-hood. The commoditized person's body, skills, abilities, labor and even reproductive capacity are no longer under his/her own control, but rather are controlled by the commoditizer. When women are treated as commodities they're not even considered to be fellow human beings that live among us, they are dehumanized by both men and women alike. When they are not considered as a fellow person they have been forced to do things that affects them both mentally and physically. This leads to human trafficking, forced marriages, prostitution, etc., where they are sold as a commodity and not considering their free will. And also most importantly, when women see themselves through the eyes of others as a commodity that leads to less obvious violence against them.

For example, women themselves often see themselves through the eyes of others as the ideals of thinness and "hotness" pervade how they think of and act towards themselves sometimes to devastating consequences such as eating disorders and suicide. In the case of sexual harassment, women are subjected to sexual innuendo, cat calls and inappropriate touching because men who sexually harass believe they have the right to comment on and have access to women's bodies. Portrayals of women as sexualized objects in media, advertisements and pornography also contribute to thinking of women as commodities.

## **II. INSTITUTIONS OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IN PURSUIT OF COMMODIFYING OF WOMEN**

Marriage and family are two aspects of the same social reality that is recognized by the world. Family is a key social institution in all societies, which makes it a cultural universal. Similarly, values and norms surrounding marriage are found all over the world in every culture, so marriage and family are both cultural universals. Statuses (i.e. wife, husband, partner, mom, dad, brother, sister, etc.) are created and sanctioned by societies. While marriage and family have historically been closely linked to culture: with marriages creating new families, their connection is

becoming more complex. Families are the basic social unit upon which a society is built and marriage is one of the known ways through which a family is built.

So something that happens in any one these institutions affects a society as a whole because them being the basic unit on which the community /society is built upon. Whatever that happens behind the closed doors still have huge impact upon the people even though they're thought to be closed or blocked. When it comes to prejudice or discrimination against women it starts mainly in the family among its family members who are considered to be your relatives. The commodification of women also starts here when they're not treated equally. This institution promotes blatant sexualisation and objectification of women.

The perception that persists on every corner of the globe – **that women and girls are inferior and that their bodies are tools with which men can get what they want, or objects that can be manhandled and tossed aside anyhow**<sup>4</sup>—is the main reason for the commodification of women. Starting from their childhood girls are made to believe that they're fragile and need support of a man to live in this society. This also leads to objectification where women are asked to dress properly, cover their parts properly after a certain age even in the presence of male family members. This is a method of moral policing with respect to the female body. Such a forced practice is a result of sexualizing women's bodies. It is not the woman that is to be blamed for wearing what she wants – rather it is the people who cannot stop sexualizing her body, even if they are her own family members.

Next important aspect being women identified as a liable commodity when a male is considered to be an asset to the family. From the birth of a girl child, she is considered to be a liability and parents start saving up for her marriage whereas for a boy they save up his studies. Dowry, that is supposed to be changing in this modern era but is still tagging a bride as a commodity, and providing the groom family with a maintenance for the bride. Even when many may argue that groom is the one to be price tagged by providing dowry but we shall not forget the one who suffers due dowry .Women are very much the epicenter of the transaction that entails threat, abuse, third-degree torture and even murder. There are instances of the groom's family asking

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<sup>4</sup> Ruth Akinradewo, The Commodification of Women's Bodies, PRESS RED,  
<https://pressred.org/2019/11/25/the-commodification-of-womens-bodies/>

for higher dowry, owing to high educational degrees and career-related success. The entire system of dowry is based on the woman being objectified in terms of being 'perfect' and agreeing to do the household chores for her husband.

During marriage the vidaai or the kanyadaan or giving away or whatever the ritual is named as but in almost all the religions ,the female is given away like she's an object that can belong to anyone that claims her or posses her ,this also commodifies women. In terms of marriage female is considered to be commodity even before getting married. In search of a perfect bride, the groom and his family go from one girl to another while humiliating the girl as a commodity which when not satisfied shall be replaced before the finalization that is marriage, it is very much similar to shopping from one shop to another in search for our perfect outfit. After marriage also she is considered as sex slave by her masculine husband where her body is not given any respect. Marital rapes are other practice that objectifies women within the family in her marriage. A married woman is considered to be a puppet in the hands of her husband. Her right over her own body ceases to exist.

The notions of consent and coercion amalgamate into one massive courtyard of misconception, arising from masculine ego. The traditional institution of marriage seems to be the key to flashing unending masculine power and objectifying women to such an extent that only makes them look like sex slaves for their husbands. Moreover, even the highest court of law in the country fails to acknowledge marital rape as a crime, stating that acknowledging the same will lead to a breakage in the institution!<sup>5</sup>

The institution of marriage clearly rests on patriarchy, of which the objectification of women in the family is an integral part. Consequently, legally and culturally marriage has evolved to become a fertile bed for violence against females, simultaneously providing the foundation for trans-generational male violence whereby sons witnessing their elders' crimes inherit an increased likelihood of following in their footsteps to inflict the same crimes against women and girls whenever and wherever the opportunity presents<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Orpheus Sen., the family unit – where the objectification of women starts, THE BREAKTHROUGH VOICE (may.13, 2019) <https://inbreakthrough.org/objectification-women-family/>

<sup>6</sup> Lynette J. Dumble, Commodification of Women and Girls at Home: The Festering of India's Male Violence, WOMEN, LAW AND CULTURE,(Nov. 2016)

In some families women are considered as birth giving machines or heir producers, where her task is to produce a heir to the family as soon as possible, not taking into consideration of her own mental stability to have a child, in some extreme cases even though the female is weak, she is forced by her own family to have a child stating that as her essential duty in a marriage and her utmost goal for this birth. If she is not able to conceive she's treated unfairly, pronouncing her ill fit for marriage and blaming it all on her body and habits, when even at times there may nothing medically wrong, even using the term wrong is considered to commodifying her since there's nothing wrong in her she's as she was and should be, with her healthy body. Then the female is thrown away like a doll that's damaged or broken when in fact there's nothing wrong with the doll but the mentality and approach of the person is sick, this also proves that a female is treated as a commodity, a thing that can be thrown away at any time or can be brought to great care if they're of any use.

Most of the cases she is treated as an unpaid laborer in the families and caretaker for the children and elders, some may state that it is her love and affection that also her to do such work but sometimes she's also tired, tired of acting as a good daughter, wife, mother, etc., she is not able to live her life as her own in her own family and with her own husband. Whatever happens she's supposed face others with a smiling face and bringing out her own emotions. Some families the most matriarchs live as robot listening to the command of its master and not showing any emotion.

In the so called civilized families or educated families, who name themselves as feminist where they allow the women of the family to work, but in most scenarios they're forced to work for the better development of their household even if they're not interested in working/employment. The groom and his family are nowadays searching for their ideal working bride who shall bring upon more money into their family. Commodification may be hidden, disguised, mystified, denied, or reinterpreted as a gift or experienced as liberating and modern<sup>7</sup>.

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313827228\\_Commodification\\_of\\_Women\\_and\\_Girls\\_at\\_Home\\_The\\_Festering\\_of\\_India's\\_Male\\_Violence/citations](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313827228_Commodification_of_Women_and_Girls_at_Home_The_Festering_of_India's_Male_Violence/citations)

<sup>7</sup> RUSS AJ, LOVE'S LABOR PAID FOR: GIFT AND COMMODITY AT THE THRESHOLD OF DEATH. *Cult. Anthropol.* 20:128-55, (2005).

**CONCLUSION**

When we talk about the commodification of women and girls, we are talking about the female being reduced to merely an object. As soon as we start dehumanizing human beings, we are capable of doing awful things to them. Women have been objectified in every stratum of society starting with the family. With such patriarchal notions and practices, imbibed from the beginning of one's life, the society cannot progress much in terms of 'morality' in its actual sense. Examining the (de)commoditization of women meshes well with feminist theories which generally attribute violence against women to expressions of patriarchal power. However, while we agree patriarchy and gender roles play a major part in why violence against women occurs and is accepted, feminist theories' focus on patriarchal culture and structural gender roles makes finding solutions to violence against women, short of changing entire societal dynamics and norms, difficult and even impossible to contemplate. So the main goal should not be about complaining but should be about bringing a change in the society where the future generation whether male or female or any other human being shall not be commodified as an object and shall be treated as equals. The disproportionate and gargantuan volume of harm that is done to women and girls globally all stems from a fundamental misunderstanding – or indeed, in many cases, denial – of who **the woman / girl-child** is<sup>8</sup> –a mere human being who should be not discriminated or commodified or objectified because she is born as a female.

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<sup>8</sup> Ruth Akinradewo, The Commodification of Women's Bodies, PRESS RED, <https://pressred.org/2019/11/25/the-commodification-of-womens-bodies/>