

**Kristeva’s Abjection and Embodiment in Girls’ Puberty  
The Analysis of Three Teen Novels**

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**Introduction**

Humans as agents perceive and identify themselves, their surrounding world and other objects through/with their body. “Embodiment” as an ontological category helps making social formations. In this approach of body as a social construct, feelings like satisfaction or shame towards the body have a tight relation with social relations. Human organs are valued and represented in different societies depending on their functions. The stomach and the sexual and lower organs are considered the most worthless of body organs. The outputs of these parts of body (feces or blood) are despicable, disgusting, and without value.

In adolescent period, body becomes a partner that wants to demonstrate itself in the best way or form possible. Consequently, it turns into an “other” with moveable boundaries. Considering the importance of adolescent period and puberty as well as the significance of explaining the importance of embodiment as a primary and fundamental

confrontation of adolescents with themselves and other objects, this article traces menstruation that is accompanied with abjection and disgust towards body with Kristeva's 'Abjection theory' in three adolescent novels. The present study analyzes girls' experiences of embodiment in maturity period, the object-body, and the menstruation phenomenon in Farhad Hassanzadeh's *Hasti*, Fariba Dindar's *Dear Squirrelfish*, and Shadi Khoshkar's *Journals of the Tree at the End of the Class*, and shows how maturity process and menstruation phenomenon linked with the symbolic order forces girls into believing body's objectification and keeps them in fear, disgust, and escape from unclean body. In the struggle between subject/ girls and the outcast/ girls' bodies, the reproduced body formation and boundaries are degraded and marginalized.

### **Method**

By choosing and presenting the term 'Speaking Subject' Julia Kristeva emphasizes on the inseparability of subject and language. Kristeva's subject on the process highlights the necessity of constructing subjectivity. From Kristeva's viewpoint, speaking subjects are those who "not only use language but are formed in/with the language. Kristeva describes language as a signifying or discursive system that speaking subject constructs and destroys itself in it" (McAfee, 2019: 30). In Kristeva's thought, "the semiotic and the symbolic are two sides of language and subjectivity that should be joined so that the subject's relation with itself and world's objects and social others would become possible" (Ibid: 22). Kristeva deals with the manner of constructing subjectivity through expanding boundaries between self and the other.

The feminine body is associated with feelings of fear and sublime and death and life. She calls this highly fluctuating and slippery situation ‘a vortex of summons and repulsion’ that is her starting point toward the idea of abjection. Unclean is anything rejectable and repulsive: “The first thing that’s considered to be dirty is mother’s body, the root and origin of child herself... Abjection is almost a way to resolve narcissistic self-identification with mother... She should draw a line between herself and her mother” (McAfee, 2019: 79-80).

### **Discussion**

Embodiment of girls (Hasti, Nina, and Baran) in these three novels with that fatherly/ manly element would move along with ‘the abject’. In each of these three novels the physical presence or absence of father, which can be seen as death or the journey without return, is visible in feelings of satisfaction or discontent, reject and ejection of feminine body and the idea and the experiences that these girls have of their bodies. The abject in *Hasti* and *Journals of the Tree at the End of the Class* is father himself that is distributed in the teenager girl’s body. In *Dear Squirrelfish*, too, father’s death and feelings resulting from it have surrounded the world around Nina as the abject. In *Hasti*, the protagonist, Hasti, frustrated by her father’s behavior and his humiliations, finds a way to escape this irritant impasse through her body. The best way is to deny and reject feminine body and disobeying its exterior appearances; therefore, cutting her hair short, wearing boyish clothes, playing football, and motorcycling are among the choices that Hasti could use to reject ‘the other’ and replace her intended ‘self’. In *Journals of the Tree*, Baran is discontented with her

body. This feeling of discontent and abjection has both internal and external and social aspects. Baran is physically similar to her father who has left the family and lives in another country. The external abject/father and the internal abject/Baran's loathing towards her body is always with her. The father's gifts are not physically fit for Baran and they are also indicative of the continuation of the abject (see. Khoshkar, 2011: 54). In *Dear Squirrelfish*, Nina is extremely distressful and restless after her father's death. Not accepting her father's death encloses her in the cocoon of her drives and internal seething. The pain and suffering of the father's death, as the abject, is intertwined with Squirrelfish's menstruation cycle. Her encounter with the first symptoms of maturity and menstruation in school's bathroom fills her with loathing and nausea. The reason for her loathing and rejection of people and situations around her is to escape from obligations made for her by the symbolic order (mother/family and school). When she encounters menstruation in this escape and rejection process, she despises herself too, and the vortex in her stomach is a sign that starts spinning in every situation related to the abjection (see. Dindar, 2016: 65).

The fear of the transforming body is rooted in the fear of being different. This fear is due to losing the individuality and totality that the subject has in her mind and a rupture felt by the teenager between her and her values. With maturity and menstruation, the girl's body is transformed into the woman's body. In menstruation culture, which is universal and meta-lingual, period symptoms should remain hidden. In all the three stories, the abject is only pointed to as a nameless/unnamable sign. The narrator does not use any term (menses/ period/ monthly cycle/ monthly

habit/ menstruation/ menstruate, etc.) for this natural and important event. In this namelessness and lack of identity, the abject is ignored and marginalized as fiercely as possible. In *Hasti*, it is only mentioned as the condition that happens just for women: “She sat on a rock... She took my hand and asked about the condition that happened to me; the condition that mother said happens for women once a month” (Hassanzadeh, 2013: 133). The symbolic order and the society’s culture treats menstruation as a despising object. In today’s cultural system and social structure, menstruation does not have that enigmatic state of ancient world; yet, it has not received the criteria of public acceptance and speaking about it introduces women’s body as representative of the abject.

### **Conclusion**

Young girl’s body experience during maturity is not merely biological. Society, culture, language, history, and power construct subject’s individuality and identity. The abject is always accompanied with a loss (the loss of father in all three novels). This loss makes inner struggles, rupture, and dichotomy inside stories’ subject/daughter and in this way the abject is intensified. In all three novels, the embodiment of girls, the extent of affection and acceptance towards their feminine bodies, and their abilities and capabilities have a close and significant relation with manly/father element and his look and attitudes. New body forms, the growth of organs, body and hormone transformations and especially menstruation make the girls alienated from their bodies. This alienation and difference causes fear. The feeling of disgust and loathing along

with fear represented in girls' disobedience finally results in denial, rejection and marginalization of the body.

**Keywords:** the outcast, body experience, abjection, Julia Kristeva, adolescent novel.

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