CONCLUSION

This study has tried to essay the various aspects and implications of the trend of “writing the body” in contemporary Indian English women’s fiction where female body and sexual desires are no longer marginalized, and have been projected as the central concern and moving force of the narrative. The dissertation underlines the fact that foregrounding the body can be tricky business for women. Whereas at the theoretical level many feminist critics have emphasized the need for and transformative significance of the assertion of the rights of the body and the pleasures of sexuality for themselves by women, translated into practice, this may not be as liberating as it seems. The present project on women’s fiction has attempted to illustrate this anomaly. It points out that the subversive power of women “writing the body” is limited to varying degrees at various levels.

My analysis of the contemporary phenomenon of foregrounding of the female body and sexuality in women’s novels has tried to underscore their central paradox because of which these emerge as subversive, but not radical; destabilizing but hardly transformative; ‘contestatory,’ but also not so much as to invite outright rejection or censor from the system. The various locations where such possibilities of subversion and compliance are realized and resisted form the core areas of this study. It has read a few representative contemporary Indian English women’s novels through three different schemes – textual analyses, study of the context of production and review of their contradictory reception; and attempted to highlight that at none of the levels these texts can be reduced to a single position of resistance or acquiescence.
The textual analyses of these novels has revealed that by representing female protagonists who consciously flout the repressive and demanding sexual norms of the society and choose to live life on their own terms, these narratives envisage an alternative way of seeing and being. However, within the realistic fictional world their transgression falls short of being absolute. Most of the time, the act of transgression remains 'reactive' rather than 'progressive,' and too private to have wider socio-political implications within the narrative world. Economic and familial constraints further limit the intensity of their resistance. The characters often find themselves having nothing to fall back upon after crossing the threshold, and make 'negotiations' and 'compromises' that would facilitate their tranquil existence. In fact, the moments of resistance and compliance often occur simultaneously or proceed/follow each other for these protagonists as part of a constant tussle between self-assertion and strategies of survival. The moments of victory for the sexually transgressive characters are fraught with anxieties and uncertainties about future in these realistic novels. Last but not the least, the sexual transgression of these characters is mostly accompanied by an 'ethical' justification and remain within the parameters of the heterosexual norms of the society. Thus, despite their obvious sexual politics, these texts fail to envisage a fully emancipated female subject position.

Whereas there is no denying the fact that when a woman writer chooses to foreground the issues of female sexuality and create sexually autonomous and desiring women, she confronts the system by exploding the myths of female sexual passivity; her writings remain wedged in the structures and conventions of the language and the genre. Patriarchal language hardly provides woman a subject position and specially the language related to body and sexuality.
invariably objectifies her. The conventions of the realistic mode of narrative limit
the options of women writers where sexual transgression of female characters can
result only in punishment, or a return to the stifling system; or at best be left
ambiguous. While dealing with the paradoxes that impinge on the practice of
“writing the body” at the level of production, the study has illustrated that women
writers have both challenged and been confined by these structures and
conventions that are seeped into the patriarchal ideology. Further, it has been
found that the location of these resistant writers within the capitalist structures
puts them in a double bind. Whereas in the capitalist society these writers’
dissenting voices have found a space for articulation as never before, their
simultaneous co-optation to the system, that commodifies female body, can not
be overlooked. The project bears out that in a world where the writers are
producers and even literary works have turned into commodities to be sold and
purchased, it becomes somewhat ironical to talk of the transformative power of
even so-called ‘unconventional texts.’ It is mostly ambiguous as to how far the
exercise of “writing the body” is counter-hegemonic in nature, and to what extent
these writers have been carried away by the ‘popular’ trend of raising the issues
of body and sexuality.

Equally uncertain seemed the affective potential of this alternative
practice, when analyzed from the perspective of reception. Whereas the success
of “writing the body” depends on its transformative effects on the readers and
society at large, it has been noticed that the readers of these novels raising the
issues of active female sexuality have interpreted the stories, their ‘moral,’ the
characters and events in contradictory ways. What has been a tale of liberation
for one, has been for another no more than a submission to the system. Whereas
for some readers a particular character embodied a feminist prototype, to others the same character has looked too conventional. The use of sexually explicit language and experiences by women writers has been the most debated area of the reception of these texts “writing the body.” For one group of readers these attested to the liberation of women writers and their characters from the sexual dogmas of the society, for another group it confirmed the alliance of the writers and their creations to the patriarchal system that wants women to be just body.

Without any concrete criterion to provide ‘correct’ reading of these texts, readers have interpreted these narratives either as celebration or objectification of the female body and sexuality. A review of the reception of these texts in the critical world has proved that at this level also “writing the body” carries uncertain and paradoxical connotations so far as its feminist ‘potential’ is concerned.

On the whole, the dissertation demonstrates that situated within the patriarchal society women can not assume an absolute resistant position and their assertion of sexual freedom can have both emancipatory and restraining repercussions, associated and reduced as they have been to ‘mere body’ and ‘sensuality’ in culture at large. Living, writing and reading is always an intersubjective experience, and depend on multiple factors that can never be reduced to one ideology or condition. The contemporary trend of “writing the body” attests to this. Accordingly, the work establishes that “writing the body” is laden with paradoxes and ambiguities at all the levels.

However, this study has confined itself to a very limited number of novels and does not claim to be ‘fully’ representative of the huge corpus Indian English women novels have produced in recent times. I have used the novels written in the realistic mode for this project, while there are several other genres and
varieties explored by Indian women writers like Githa Hariharan in *When Dreams Travel*, Suniti Namjoshi in *Mothers of Mayadiip*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in *The Palace Of Illusions*. Besides, in my discussion I have limited myself to just one aspect of female body – sexual desires and their fulfillment. In fact, often in the same novels, many other equally important issues related to body are there that deserve to be dealt with critically such as, the anxiety over body image, the sick body, the suffering body, the violated body, the ageing body and the adolescent female body. Moreover, the popular romances and chick novels display somewhat different representation of the same issues, and are equally worthy of critical attention. A socio-cultural study of these texts along with textual analyses might reveal a complex web of relationships between women and popular culture.

In addition, each of the three aspects focused upon in this study can be dealt with more rigorously. At the textual level, the linguistic analyses of the language of body and sexuality can produce fruitful results and underline the complexity of the situation when women write or speak about body and sexual desires. A statistical study of the mechanism of production and the matrix of capital that surround the ‘rich, successful and famous women writers’ “writing the body” may also entail shocking figures and concretely establish the relationship between the two. Similarly a data based research of the real common readers’s responses to the texts foregrounding the body may help in measuring the impact of these works more accurately.

Despite all these limitations, the study has tried to underscore the need to study literary texts beyond textual analyses. Without denying the immense significance of a subversive discourse like “writing the body” that at once
challenges the perpetual silence, passivity and ‘modesty’ imposed on women, the study has emphasized the need to avoid the “romantic fiction” of resistance through reclaiming the body. It has shown that a simplistic equation between “writing the body” and women’s empowerment is not desirable. As a cultural practice this trend needs a more nuanced and balanced understanding and reading.

While paradoxes and uncertainties underlie “writing the body” at every level, this study has emerged out of a firm belief in the power of these narratives. The very fact that now women can and are writing about women’s rights to their bodies and legitimacy of their sexual desire, is both a statement on and participant in the transforming cultural ethos that would hopefully change the relationship between women, their bodies and culture at large, for the better.

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