INTRODUCTION

Female sexuality. We’re ashamed of owning it, we can’t speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, not frightened of displaying it — it is this Surpanakha I’m going to write about.

-Deshpande 1996: 191

This is what Sumi, the protagonist of Shashi Deshpande’s novel A Matter of Time, intends to write. However, her desired plan does not materialize as she dies soon after in an accident. This, broadly and metaphorically, has been the story of women writers for a long time across cultures, and continues to be so in many. The task of writing about sexually charged women who are not frightened of accepting or displaying their body and its desires has not been easy for women writers – in India or elsewhere. As women writers themselves have been regarded as anomalies, their writing about this tabooed area of life proves to be another radical transgression and has met opposition at various levels. These come from both ‘within’ and ‘outside.’ Patriarchal society prohibits such uninhibited expression for challenging the ethical values and feminine norms of modesty, thereby posing threat to the social order. The literary values do not encourage this practice for being too trivial for literary standards. Further, a major hurdle comes from ‘within.’ The most obvious reason for this censorship is the cultural tendency to relate women writers with their plots and characters (Tharu and Lalita 1993; Sen 2000). Ammu Joseph et al. in their ‘Introduction’ to Just Between Us: Women Speak about their Writing (2004) have observed that
women's writing is more frequently seen as confessional than men's (19). This link proscribes most of the women writers to explore corporeal concerns which may disturb their "family peace and public image" (Sen 2000: 302) and end up bringing "shame" and even "punishment" for the self and the loved ones (Joseph 2004: 22-25). It took women writers a long time and hard struggle to be able to 'accept' and 'write about' the female body and its sexual desires 'positively.' This project looks at the various contours of a contemporary, roughly post mid-1980s, trend in Indian English women's fiction, where the female body and sexual desires are no longer marginalized, and have been foregrounded as central concern and moving force of the narrative.

Women, Body and Writing have had a history of 'troubled relationship' to each other. Feminists, across borders, have observed that in patriarchal cultures women are invariably coupled with, and reduced to mere body, emotions and sentiments. Whereas in Western intellectual discourses, women and body are always on the inferior side of the 'binary oppositions' that shape the Western culture and thought, somewhat similar is the case of 'Indian tradition.' Whether we talk of Indian philosophy, religion or myths, women and body are often called "Maya"; to be relinquished in the pursuit of higher goals of life, be it Knowledge, Salvation or Honour (Sethi 2000: 13). By the rule of association, writing, being a serious mental activity requiring mind, reason and rationality, becomes an anomaly for women in the cultural and critical discourses.

Accordingly, many feminist critics believe that "women's writing" and that too "writing the body" has the potential to disrupt the patriarchal establishment which silences not only women's voice but also their experiences of body and sexuality, its desires and pleasures (Cazenave 2001; Cixous 1997;
Irigaray 1999; Singer 1993; Snitow 1980; Wolff 1990; Woolf 1996). For them, body is not just a critical site of oppression for women with which they are always associated, but also something representing women’s difference and a “site also for agency which allows for the possibilities of negotiation, intervention, contestation and transformation” (Jackson and Scott 1998; Price and Shildrick 1999; Singer 1993; Thapan 1997:3). They feel an urgent need to reclaim the body and celebrate it. Beneath such a proposition lies a general belief that in patriarchal culture, male dominance is exercised through control over the female body and sexuality, its pleasures and desires. In this hegemony, as women have almost no voice, their desires are mostly constructed in ways that enforces their subjugation. This is done specifically by investing women with those forms of desire that facilitate male supremacy such as, “the pleasure of surrender, self-sacrifice, and service to others” (Singer 1993: 147). This process might be seen as a mode of silencing, a silencing that prohibits articulation on the part of women as subjects. This silencing must be countered with raising the voice, by writing.

The realization that language plays a crucial role in defining and maintaining men’s world, and delineating and enclosing women’s space, has led many feminists to emphasize the relevance of language in resisting patriarchy and its oppressive constructs. Thus, both ‘writing’ and “writing the body” provide a double challenge to the misrepresentation and sometimes even exclusion of women’s body and sexuality and the perpetuation of their subjugation and silence. All these critics, emphasizing the need to articulate women’s desires and pleasures, firmly believe in the impact of cultural representations in shaping, influencing, and normalizing ideas and images through reiteration and wide circulation. For them, a non-sexist representation of women’s body and sexuality
in cultural narratives, discourses and other media is going to affect how its consumers desire, wish, or understand themselves and others.

But there is another group of feminists which holds the view that re-emphasizing the relationship between women’s subjectivity and their biology would lose its critical and political edge because of the commonly held association between the two and will only help in patriarchal perpetuation of “woman as body” (Bordo 2003: 5). Interestingly, this negative association between women and body has been so powerful in cultural discourses that many feminists have been reluctant to engage with the female body (Ghosh 2006; Wolff 1990). They see equality predicated on the need to go beyond the influence of biology and emphasize the potential of women for higher intellectual achievements regardless of their troublesome bodies (Beauvoir 1997; Firestone 1970; Kaplan 1986: 32-56; Wollstonecraft 1988). For them, the way forward is not to reclaim and revalorize the body, but to argue that the ideal standard of disembodied subjecthood is as appropriate to, and attainable by women as it is by men (Price and Shildrick 1999). Though liberal feminists widely held this idea, this does not mean that it has now become obsolete. Even now, for example, many feminists abhor the idea of having a feminine body and giving importance to sexual satisfaction. For them women’s body has been given too much attention throughout the history, so the focus must now shift to intellectual capacities. Feminist activists supporting censorship without qualification best exemplify this faction of critics (Ghosh 2006; Sarkar and Butalia 1995). Then, there are many who recognize the importance of raising the issues of body, but also know that foregrounding it would bring unnecessary troubles in the way to equality. As body and sexuality are matters closely related to the issues of purity of caste and
religion, they prefer to avoid it (Sen 2000). In fact, ‘body’ and ‘sexuality’ have emerged as two major fields of study in feminist critical and cultural theory since the 1980s and despite the disparity in their opinions on the respective nature and role of these two ‘lived experiences’ in women’s lives, feminist thinkers and critics unanimously acknowledge their significance.

This project concerns itself with a cultural phenomenon in contemporary India, where the silences and taboos on women’s body and sexuality have been challenged and an alternative discourse of active female sexuality has emerged. This study looks at the emergence of this alternative discourse in contemporary Indian English women’s fiction. Here I have tried to establish that the issues of the female body and sexuality, corporeal desires and pleasures, have occupied Indian English women writers to such an extent in recent times that one can easily term it a ‘trend.’ In contrast to their predecessors, contemporary women writers are quite at ease in raising these ‘marginalized’ and ‘controversial’ issues in their fictional works. This discursive practice has surfaced in conjunction with similar cultural discourses in fields as diverse as cinema, soap operas, advertisements, paintings, sculpture, medicine and law. In these fields also ingenuousness is visible with regard to active female sexual desires. The thrust of this study is to underscore the fact that this ‘popular’ practice in contemporary fiction is constantly trapped in a ‘double bind.’ Whereas it is certainly ‘revolutionary’ in nature as it foregrounds the till now forbidden issues of the female body and its pleasures and desires, simultaneously, it is reductive for being still caught mostly in the realistic mode of ‘representation’ where fictional characters and plots are shaped in accordance with the socio-cultural realities of the narrative context. Nearly all of the contemporary Indian English women’s
fiction have identifiable socio-cultural setting and follow the rule of plausibility. This aspect, though it makes their ‘sexual politics’ more poignant, raises problems in terms of its viability. An agential act of female sexual freedom meets several challenges within the narrative and at the level of ‘narrative design.’ Acts of self-assertion soon give way to acts of submission and narrative closure mostly defies celebration of this liberty. Thus, the revolutionary edge of ‘body politics’ becomes somewhat blunt, and the narratives emanate contradictory messages. Besides, the patriarchal capitalist space of ‘production’ of these literary works also undermine their political stance, since it remains ambiguous as to how far this exercise of “writing the body” is counter hegemonic in nature, and to what extent these writers are carried away by the ‘popular trend’ of raising the issues of body. Equally paradoxical becomes the situation when perceived from the perspective of ‘reception.’ A text does not exist in a vacuum and more than the author it needs readers. Reading only makes a text ‘living.’ As the relationship between women and body has been of both ‘proximity’ and ‘alienation,’ as body is both the site of female subjugation and resistance, the reading of the texts foregrounding women’s body and sexuality have been and can be contradictory. What this project highlights is that the practice of “writing the body” does not need to be celebrated naively. As it is a complex issue, a more nuanced and contextualized ‘reading’ is required to decipher the shifting positions between resistance and compliance that shape and characterize this practice at all the three inter-related levels — representation, production and reception. This is the focal point of the project. However, I firmly believe that regardless of the ‘paradoxical’ nature of the discourses of active female sexuality, generating and disseminating alternative stories is preferable to living just with
the dominant ones. These narratives certainly are valuable additions to our cultural corpus.

The work focuses on some of the fictional works of five contemporary authors - Anita Nair, Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan, Namita Gokhale, and Shobha De. The choice is as random as it is purposeful. I have deliberately chosen an array of fictional works from both 'literary' and 'popular' categories, though within the categories, the selection is representative. The novels chosen for the project are obviously woman-centered and display ‘sexual politics’ overtly. Their protagonists through conscious choices in exercising sexual liberty undermine the patriarchal norms of the society. Even if the narratives do show them asserting and at times flaunting their sexual desires and the right of the body to pleasure, it is not that they were always ‘rebellious’ women, or remain so after the acts of resistance. What marks these texts is their struggle to raise a voice and to act as per the demand of the body which is denied the freedom to love or to have pleasure under the various strictures of patriarchal society such as matrimony, monogamy, motherhood, chastity, fidelity, virginity, shame, honour, age, caste and class. Noticeable is the fact that none of these protagonists are extraordinarily talented or feminist activists in any sense. They are ‘ordinary’ women with their strengths and frailties, desires and responsibilities, situated as they are within a complex matrix of social relations. Their challenge to the sexual norms of the society appears at different levels and is of different intensity, depending on whether the challenges are purely private or become public. The extent to which the barriers of class, caste, religion, age, and kinship are faulted in the course of sexual transgression is of equal importance to measure the gravity of the action. In the struggle to hold their integrity, at times these women
flounder and get punished; or choose to revert back to the system; or give up the oppressive structures of the society and family altogether, though without any clue about future course of events. Whatever may be the ultimate consequence of the transgression, these narratives are certainly different from earlier ones in foregrounding the issues of female desires and the legitimacy of sexual fulfillment, and thus create an alternative discourse. It is mainly because of their 'political' bearing, that these texts have been chosen. The ten texts are – Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupe* (2001) and *Mistress* (2005); Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997); Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992); Namita Gokhale’s *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984) and *Shakuntala* (2005); and Shobha De’s *Socialite Evenings* (1989), *Starry Nights* (1991), *Snapshots* (1995) and *Second Thoughts* (1996).

The imbalance in terms of the number of works and writers needs a word of explanation. Whereas only one work each by Roy and Hariharan has been chosen, two each from Nair and Gokhale have been selected. The largest numbers of novels are by De. While Hariharan, Nair and Roy have written ‘sophisticated’ fictions, Namita Gokhale remains an in-between figure. She was almost a predecessor to the ‘Shobha De style’ in her first novel *Paro*, and then moved on to the more ‘literary’ works like *Gods, Graves and Grandmothers* (1994), *A Himalayan Love Story* (1996), and *Shakuntala*. Shobha De represents a class of her own by virtue of being the initiator of a ‘new genre’ in Indian English fiction. On an average, a balance has been maintained in the number of literary and popular fiction. Though the project looks exclusively at fictional works by Indian English women writers, this does not mean that i) it is solely a literary concern; ii) that it is purely an Indian phenomenon; iii) that women have raised
the issues of body and corporeal rights in fiction only; iv) that men have not written at all about the legitimacy of female sexual desires; or v) that other Indian literatures are less ‘progressive’ and ‘modern’ in comparison to the Indian English literature. Along with literature, contemporary Indian cultural products like cinema, high art, soap-operas, advertisements, folk culture and popular culture have depicted the images of sexually active women (Bose 2006; Cassale 2000; Chaudhry 2001; Ghosh 2006; Goodwin and Gold 1994; John and Nair 1998; Kapur 2005; Menon 2007; Thapan 1997). In fact, concern with the female body and sexuality is ‘in vogue’ in literature of Europe, South Asia and Africa. Extensive studies have been done on the feminist politics of body and sexuality in these literatures (Cazenave 2001; Katrak 2006; Shaw 2007; Suleiman 1985; Veit-Wild & Naguschewski 2005). In addition to fiction, Indian English women writers have raised issues of female corporeality in the field of poetry and drama as well. One just needs to think of poets like Kamala Das and Suniti Namjoshi, and playwrights such as Dina Mehta, Manjula Padmanabhan and Poile Sengupta to establish this point. If not novelists, Indian English male dramatists like Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani and Vijay Tendulkar have written extensively on the issues of female body and sexuality. Literatures by women in other Indian languages have often raised these issues. Amrita Pritam, Indira Goswami, Kamala Desai, Krishna Sobti, Lalithambika Antharjanam, Mridula Garg, Pratibha Ray, Sarojini Sahoo and Triveni are among those who have written explicitly of female sexuality. Here it may also be added that these issues are not exclusive to contemporary women writers, with earlier writers such as Muddupalini, Indira Saharabuddhe, Rasheed Jahan and Ismat Chughtai having contributed to bringing this tabooed arena into visibility. However, what makes contemporary Indian
English women's fiction unique is their persistent concern with this theme, the prime space allocated to this issue, and the vital presence of both these writers and their works in the Indian publishing market.

II

In the wake of post-structuralist and feminist ideas, the body and sexuality have become major concerns in critical discourses across cultural disciplines, specially, since the last two decades of the twentieth century with attention devoted to these by many feminist critics (Blood 2005; Jackson and Scott 1998; Menon 2007; Price and Shildrick 1999; Rosser 2001; Thapan 1997, 2009). Since then particular focus has been given to the discursive nature of the body and sexuality and the embodied character of the subject (Bordo 2003: 33; Thapan 1997, 2009). Women-oriented research and theories have tried to examine the impact of cultural discourses on body and sexuality in the formation of the 'self of woman' at various stages in diverse ways. A number of anthologies and monographs, and theoretical as well as socio-cultural studies which exclusively deal with the issues related to body and sexuality are now available (Bordo 2003; Firestone 1970; Jackson and Scott 1998; John and Nair 1998; Kapur 2005; Katrak 2006; Menon 2007; Niranjana 2001; Plummer 1995; Price and Shildrick 1999; Puri 1999; Singer 1993; Srivastava 2004; Thapan 1997, 2009). Most of the general works on feminist studies have a specific section devoted to body and sexuality studies. Journals have special numbers devoted to body and sexuality readings.\textsuperscript{viii} Besides, body studies is not limited to just gender or sexuality, with
the suffering body, the aging body, the colored body, the mutilated body and male bodies becoming areas of equal interest.

This study is centered on one aspect of body and sexuality. It deals with the problematics of female agency and resistance in the context of fictional narratives by women, which are at once liberating and constraining by virtue of their representation of the female body and sexual desires. The prism used is a feminist one and the idea of representation, female agency and its socio-cultural implications are central to the work. As already stated, the practice of foregrounding the body has been seen as a disrupting practice when it comes from women authors. Framed within the patriarchal capitalist culture it gets tamed and at times gives contradictory signals. The study highlights this ambivalent nature of the contemporary Indian English women’s novels that foreground the female body and sexuality. Feminists and cultural theorists have shown that in the lived experiences, agency or victimization are never absolute (Basu 2000; Bordo 2003; Bourdieu 1994; Fox 1994; Goodwin and Gold 1994; Kalpagam 2000; Kapur 2005; Niranjana 2001; Puri 1999; Sangari and Vaid 1989; Sunder Rajan 1993, 2000, 2003; Thapan 1997, 2009; Wolff 1990). The same act may have contradictory repercussions and what looks like agency, may be just blind submission to the inherent system, just as, at times, silence can speak louder than words. The selected narratives of female agency based on the conventions of realism portray this. Besides, in the contemporary capitalist era with literature having been transformed into a commodity, the author’s intentions cannot be seen in isolation. Market conditions shape the cultural products to a great extent, though not solely. At the receiving end, consumers or readers play an equally important role in the ‘concretization’ of the text and may arrive at different
conclusions depending on their ideological and cultural affiliations. Thus, a complex inter-relationship exists between representational images and practices, and socio-cultural ‘conditions’ and ‘conditioning.’ Both contest and critique, shape and influence each other equally. If new or radical modes of representation confront the socio-cultural milieu, it is the socio-cultural context alone that allows the existence and sustenance of such transformational practices. Transformation in society is never a smooth and easy flow. The struggle of the emergent is always with both the dominant and the residual, which try to contain or assimilate it. Influenced by post-structuralist critics, specially Foucault, many feminist critics have read the cultural phenomenon and practices as diverse as cinema, soap-operas, advertisements, fictions, romances, folk songs, day-to-day practices, prostitution, personal narratives that involve or represent images of the female body and sexuality using this framework. Discarding the simplistic dichotomy between passive victimhood and liberating agency, they find cultural practices too complex to be defined in either/or terms. It is widely accepted by now that because of the tangible relationship between the female body and the female self, the lived acts of women – both apparently submissive and daring – cannot be pinpointed to just one position of power, dominated or dominant. Most of the time, the two positions along the axis of power exist simultaneously and fluidly, dependent on the position and location of the perceiver.

Susan Bordo in her *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (2003) illustrates that the “duality of active spirit and passive body” (11) has been one of the most powerful dualities that inform Western ideologies of gender. However, in her study of fashion and body images she also critiques the “old” feminist discourse that views women as “passive” and “victim” only,
without any agency. In such a position, Bordo finds that there is an “insensitivity
to the multiplicity of meaning that can be read in every cultural act and practice”
(23). Her examples show that the same “body image” or “style” can reflect both
feminine fragility and masculine strength; submission to the patriarchal ethos and
“resistance to establishment authority,” (24) depending on the context as well as
the perception of the subject. Given these factors that influence meaning making
Bordo says, “‘reading’ bodies becomes extremely complex business,” (24) and
the feminist discourse that has “employed a framework of oppressor and
oppressed, villains and victims,” requires reconstruction to be able to adequately
address issues of “modern power” (26).

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan expresses similar concerns in Real and Imagined
Women (1993), while dealing with the issues of subjectivity, representation and
the politics of the postcolonial. In her critique of Tharu and Lalita’s position in
Women Writing in India that subversion lies “latent in women writings,” that
women’s writings are always “contestatory,” Sunder Rajan observes that “the
discovery of resistance in women’s writing also requires the investment of our
desires and the acknowledgement of our politics as women/feminist reading” (3,
original emphasis). She feels the necessity of “a judicious review of the politics
of women’s writing – one which recognizes that it is not always resistant, and
which historicizes its conformism scrupulously” (5). She here tries to avoid the
“romantic fiction of resistance” and follows a model where resistance and
submission are not intrinsic to the practice or the text, but lie in the context of
reception and production. According to her, resistance is “inescapably structured
by the terms of the dominant, though not ultimately reducible to it” (130). In
another place she points out that it is imperative for feminists to break “free from
the masculine model" of "heroic resistance" and give attention to everyday
"negotiations" through which women survive (2000: 161). In yet a different
context while talking of the "prostitution question," she emphasizes the central
She shows the divide among feminists, some of whom feel that prostitution is a
form of "sexual degradation," and others regard that a woman in sex work is in
more control of her sexuality than "women in general in other (non-commercial)
relationships." Not only for the outside observers, contradictions of perceptions
exist for the insiders as well. Sunder Rajan notes that the prostitutes' accounts
themselves "can be contradictory and shifting ... the performance of the sexual
act may lead prostitutes to see themselves either as free, fully expressive, in
charge; or as degraded, used and manipulated" depending on the context i. e.
"presence or absence of desire" (2003: 130).

An identical position on the nature of resistance is that of Meenakshi
Thapan in Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity (1997) who demonstrates
that in the living experiences of women "the possibilities of transformation
through resistance are always constrained by the restricting nature of the
dominant constructions based in gender, class, caste, and regional factors" (10).
Rhetoric of resistance and agency in the context of gender is dealt with by
Chandra T. Mohanty in her postcolonial feminist study Feminism without
Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (2003) who asserts that
although the third world women are homogenized as victims' in the Western
feminist discourses, these women are not mere victims of the production process,
as they resist at various junctures (32). She feels that "understanding the inherent
contradiction in women's location within various structures" is necessary so that
effective “political action and challenges” can be devised (33). Like Sunder Rajan she also says that mere existence of third world woman’s narratives in itself is not evidence of decentering “hegemonic histories and subjectivities.”

Equally important is the context of production and reception. Thus, she says:

It is the way in which they are read, understood, and located institutionally that is of paramount importance. After all, the point is not to just record one’s history of struggle, or consciousness, but how they are recorded; the way we read, receive and disseminate such imaginative records is immensely significant (77-78).

In yet another ground-breaking postcolonial feminist work *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (1989) Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid deal with the historical processes which reconstituted patriarchy in colonial India and hint at the discord between intention and result. The examples of Sangari and Vaid are evidence of the fact that reform oriented “social legislations” started by the British rule with so-called “good” intention were often counterproductive, more so for women – be it regarding *sati*, widow remarriage or labour legislation (interestingly all related intimately with the female body). These reforms were either moved by ulterior motives or brought without much heed to the cultural matrix of caste, class and kinship involved. Rather than empowering women these legislations limited women’s choices (16-17). But Sangari and Vaid are sensitive enough to acknowledge that though the history of reforms – colonial, indigenous or nationalist does not seem “inspiring,” freighted as it was with many kinds of patriarchal assumptions; one of the reasons for the limitations was that they (the reformers) “inevitably could not exceed the limits of the age” (19). In “Consent, Agency and Rhetorics of Incitement” (1993) Sangari looks at the issue
of female agency through the prism of class and caste and notes that “women's agency is a contextual question” and remains problematic in both theory and practice because women are simultaneously class differentiated and subject to the frequent cross-class expansion of patriarchal ideologies (867). At once “determined” and “determining,” for her, agency, in general, is a tricky area and may imply consent and resistance to the system concurrently. The idea is augmented in the volume titled *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays* (Sarkar and Butalia 1995) which confirms that not all public acts by women are empowering for women. As it happens in the case of women’s affiliations to the Hindu right, female “agency” may act to perpetuate their own subordination.

Ironies of unassuming submission are investigated by Ratna Kapur as she draws examples from postcolonial India to demonstrate that a homogenous “victim rhetoric” (2005: 2) can be easily disrupted as the so-called “inferior” group may use the mantle of the “inferiority” in their own interest, and while remaining within the system can challenge it. On the other hand, Nira Gupta Cassale in “Bearing Witness: Rape, Female Resistance, Male Authority and the Problems of Gender Representation in Popular Indian Cinema” (2000) underscores the reverse dimension of resistant agency. She investigates how the raped woman’s “resistance” to patriarchy in popular cinema, though radical, often gets punctured by either calling for the support of a man to fulfill its goal (as in *Daamini*) or getting metamorphosed into other shapes (as in *Mirchmasala*). Popular cinema can hardly bear the “political” burden of hard core feminism. Somewhat similar is the case of print media which, according to Maitrayee
Chaudhury, shows the sign of “simultaneous cooptation and backlash” towards feminist agendas (2000: 263).

Specifically dealing with body images in cultural practices, Sylvia K. Blood’s *Body Work: The Social Constriction of Women’s Body Image* (2005) underlines the same theme of ambivalence. In the line of Bordo she also argues that women must not be understood simply as passive victims, but as active agents also, “actively and knowingly engaged in the practices that could be understood as oppressive” (48, 57). In her reading of a popular women’s magazine *More*, she says that though these popular magazines and representations have “normalizing and disciplining” effects, “there are always gaps, inconsistencies and the possibility of resisting dominant meaning” (82).

Although made in the field of painting, Rosemary Butterton’s insight holds good in the field of most of the representational arts. In *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists And The Body* (1996) she notes that “making images of the female body becomes a risky business” (10) as both sexist pornography and feminist sexual narratives make use of the same elements, thus leaving things to the viewers. Joy Deshmukh- Ranadive’s observation in “Controlling Sexuality” (2005) that “paradoxically” woman’s body has become the “site of the expression and realization of tradition and modernity and acts as a signifier for both” follows the same line of thought (440). Shohini Ghosh in “The Troubled Existence of Sex and Sexuality: Feminists Engage with Censorship” (2006) moves beyond the textual aspects and refers to the ambivalence surrounding the issues of the female body and sexuality in terms of reception. She writes,

What may be ‘positive’ and empowering for one person may be critiqued or ignored by another ... making sense of representations
and cultural praxis hinges on a recognition of identities as multiple, unstable, historically situated and products of ongoing differentiation (269).

The ambivalence regarding female agency in relation to body and sexuality has been the focus of many ethnographic studies in Indian scholarship. Seemanthini Niranjana in *Gender and Space: Femininity, Sexualization of the Female Body* (2001) reflects on the "mediated" nature of body and undercuts the pure nature of female agency. She feels that it is necessary to conceive of a female bodily subject as both agent (a source of action) and a subject (subjected to a set of rules or laws preceding her) (70). It is in this dialogic situation that women's lives and "acts" must be situated, as her "acting" can "mimic" but can be limiting at the same time. Her study concludes that "although the idea of domination-subordination is intrinsic to the concept of power, one could maintain that it is impossible to identify clear-cut bodies of dominators and dominated" (89). In an article titled "Off The Body: Further Considerations on Women, Sexuality and Agency," (1999) through her reading of the silence of the abducted women in partition narratives, gossip in a ethnographic context, and incitation of a female political leader, Niranjana emphasizes "how certain bodily practices and codes of sexuality operate to circumscribe and inflect agency in particular contexts" (1). Srimati Basu in "The Bleeding Edge: Resistance as Strength and Paralysis" (2000) studies Ashapurna Devi's *Pratham Pratishruti*, a Bangla novel, and some ethnographic sites and concludes that female agency and resistance are issues that are too complicated to lead to a singular interpretation and every act of resistance involves some accommodation in it and accommodations are not always without some form of resistance.
Gloria Goodwin and Ann Grodzins Gold have adopted the same approach in *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India* (1994). In their ethnographical study on women's oral traditions and their use of language, stories, ritual songs, personal narratives, and ordinary conversations from the rural Northern India they reflect that these speech genres constitute a moral discourse in which gender and kinship identities are not only constructed and represented, but also "negotiated and contested" in life. They also see the importance of little and everyday occurrences in resisting and challenging hegemonic construction of feminine subjectivities and remark, "When Indian women represent themselves in their own words, no single unitary voice is heard" (9). Jyoti Puri's *Woman, Body, Desire in Postcolonial India: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality* (1999) works with an identical framework. While exploring the ways in which "middle and upper class women's bodies, sexualities, and gender identities" are regulated through women's personal narratives, she suggests that "as their narratives evince normalizing discourse and disciplinary strategies; they also reveal how women internalize, reproduce and challenge these strategies of social control" (3). Prem Chaudhry in "Lustful Women, Elusive Lovers: Identifying Males as Objects of Female Desire" (2001) reads women's songs and the oral tradition of rural north India, produced exclusively by and for women where lustful women place man as an object of desire and thus offers an alternative moral perspective. But the author poignantly notes that, "The assumption of power in women's songs is in direct contrast to their powerlessness in the male worlds of family/clan/caste" (43). The existence of such a discourse may be compared to Bakhtenian carnival – potentially dangerous yet contained and sanctioned by the powerful.
The disparity between discourse and practice is also emphasized by Leena Abraham (2004) as she reads the discourses and practices of sexuality among college going urban youth of lower income groups in Mumbai. Her study shows that despite the “liberal” milieu of the metropolitan and the transforming effects of globalization, young women of Mumbai mostly remain within the clutches of a traditional belief system that valorizes concepts like “pativrata” as far as sexual behaviour is concerned. All these sociological studies exemplify that women’s lives and lived experiences are fractured, constantly shifting between positions of power and subjugation.

Romance is a genre which epitomizes the complexity of female agency and resistance at all the three levels—representation, production and reception. The idea has been explored in many studies conducted since the 1980s. Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (1984) by Janice Radway, is a significant work in the ethnographic study of popular culture and more specifically the genre of romance novel and its audience. Radway notes that romance novels, with their idealized narratives, heroines and heroes, fulfill certain “basic psychological needs for women that have been induced by the culture and its social structures, but that often remain unmet in day-to-day existence as the result of concomitant restrictions on female activity” (112-13). Along with acknowledging that romance novels reinforce gender roles, she feels that reading of romances by women can be viewed as subversive — providing their female readers moments of escape from their prescribed roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, “reading the romance” reveals that women are not satisfied in these roles, pointing to places of discontentment within patriarchy. This study challenges the traditional ways of reading which focused only on the
text. Influenced by reader response theories and materialist school of criticism, Radway believes that the contexts of reception and production are equally significant while analyzing a text. Consequently, she refuses to label the reading of romance as definitively hegemonic or oppositional, and prefers to see the complexity of reading practices and the multiple meanings that are contained within reading romances. She argues that critical attention must shift from the text itself, taken in isolation, to the complex social event of production and reading that would involve the complicated business of publishing and distribution as well as the individual reader's engagement with the text. *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction* (Radford 1986) points to this same aspect of romance in relation to women and culture at large. Radford in her 'Introduction' asks if romance should be seen as “the seedbed of a new subversive women's art form or just trash,” and eventually decides that these could be both as “texts do not speak to a unified feminine reading subject, but to a divided, contradictory and bisexual one” (16). Both these works emerged in reaction to the traditional view of romance readers as “masochistic, regressive and passive.” Ann Rosalind Jones in her article “Mills & Boon Meets Feminism” (1986) once again proves that this model is reductive one. Pertinently she writes, “Though the text is a fixed verbal structure, its use or 'meaning' is constituted by socially and historically situated subjects” (14). A study of Indian popular narratives conducted by Amita Tyagi and Patricia Uberoi in “Learning To 'Adjust': Conjugal Relations in Indian Popular Fiction” (1994) attests to the above observation that despite an overall appearance of compliance with the dominant social values and gender stereotypes, romance fictions may also have a
subversive aspect, and their resistance or docility depends on the subjective positions of the readers.

Anne Cranne-Francis in *Feminist Fictions: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (1990) demonstrates that regardless of the fact that feminist fiction writers use the strategy of constructing “feminist reading positions” by changing the conventions of the genre and by voicing dialogic positions, they can hardly deny that “as patriarchal discourses are coded into generic conventions,” the readers may consciously or unconsciously “subvert the feminist discourse and reading position they are constructing in the text” (205). The role of the reader in realizing the intentions of the text is stressed by Susan Rubin Suleiman in “(Re) Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism” (1985). In her reading of two American fictional works, Erica Jong’s *Fear of Flying* and Rita Mac Brown’s *Rubyfruit Jungle* she establishes that both the novels depicting female erotica in startling language have feminist potential (46). The paradox lies in their becoming bestsellers, which might be read as an evidence of the “fact” that the American public is becoming more tolerant to what stories women can tell and the language they can use; or it might also have meant that none of the fiction posed any “genuine threat to the existing ways of seeing and being.” She writes categorically, “Like modern capitalism, modern patriarchy has a way of assimilating any number of potentially subversive gestures into the ‘mainstream,’ where whatever subversive energy they may have possessed becomes neutralized” (47).

Many feminist literary studies have also pronounced the significance of moving beyond simplistic textual analyses to a more comprehensive understanding of literary products, because in Ken Plummer’s words, stories “are
social actions embedded in social worlds" (1995: 17). Barbara Correll’s “Notes on the Primary Text: Woman’s Body and Representation in *Pumping Iron II: The Women* and ‘Breast Giver’” (1989) depicts the female body as the “primary text” upon which cultural codes form the secondary texts and silence the voice of the primary. But Correll presumes the possibility of body often exceeding representation and interrupting “those discursive practices which are dedicated to its containment” (289-90). Her readings “expose the problem of ‘writing the body’ as a feminist project, as well as the theories which “read the body as the … site of unproblematic resistance” (292). Just because some texts open up emancipatory space for feminist politics, it does not mean that the female body is “an essentially emancipatory site” (293). According to her, the texts representing the female body and sexuality, in fact, “re-enact the debate on the female body in feminist theory itself” (293).

In *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (1989) Patricia Waugh notes that women have traditionally used their bodies “as instrument of protest against their ‘feminine’ positioning and identification,” even though it is the same space where their subjugation is marked. Be it a certain sort of “illness” such as eating disorder, hysteria, or obsession with “reducing” the body, these can be “seen as a ‘symptom’ of powerlessness and a form of resistance to power” (174) simultaneously, as “the female body is an area where struggle for control is … enacted” (177). To this Waugh makes a significant addition by saying that “within the context of late capitalist society, these contradictions are rendered even more acute through the alienating effects of commodification” (177). Postcolonial context makes “body politics” equally tricky as shown by Ketu H. Katrak in *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third*
World (2006). In this work, she calls for “demystify[-ing] resistance” (2). Rather than “glorify any and all resistance,” she seeks to assess the narrative incidents of non-compliance in terms of their outcome in her analyses of the “body politics” in third world women’s literature (11).

Janet Wolff in Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture (1990) expresses her skepticism of the traditional assumption that “politically correct features of a work would be enough to guarantee its effectivity” (4-5). Wolff says that we may certainly point out the potential advantages, limitations, or dangers of such textual politics, but in the end we can not legislate about its effectivity without reference to the specific circumstances of the readers or viewers. Feminist analysis must combine textual analyses with the sociological study of the viewers and readers, the contexts and institutions of reception (5). Rita Felski makes a similar statement in Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change (1989) when she writes, “There is nothing inherently feminist in experimental or for that matter any other form of writing” (2).

An additional insight on the significance of “contextualizing” texts at the level of representation, production and reception is provided by Ruth Vanita's reading of ancient Indian classics like Manusmriti and Mahabharata in “The Self Has No Gender: A Female and a Male Scholar Debate Women’s Status in Mahabharata” (2005). This work illustrates that cultural texts are far from being monolithic and “unified” as both the above mentioned texts contain passages that exalt women at one time and derogate them at another. Implying that cultural texts in general have the potential for contradictory readings, she also underlines that ideological issues are involved in what we (readers/critics) choose to
emphasize and commit to memory and what we choose to marginalize and forget (20-21).

Cinema is an area where a more nuanced reading has been envisaged and implemented in India than in literature. Priyamvada Gopal in “Of Victims and Vigilantes: The Bandit Queen Controversy” (1999) records that “the appropriation of a traditionally masculine grammar of violence by a female protagonist” has both been criticized as “an index of a society increasingly receptive to violence” and “celebrated for depicting subaltern agency” (293 emphasis added). She situates the controversy surrounding the film The Bandit Queen “in the context of feminist debates on the representation of sex and violence” (13). Gopal claims that whereas Phoolan Devi protested that the depiction of her repeated rapes in the film were a matter of shame for her and exploitation on the part of the film maker, Kapur insisted on the progressive politics of the depiction of Phoolan’s victimization, and of the caste based wars she led in retaliation (14). According to Gopal, both had their supporters among the viewers and the controversy demonstrates the paradox of the representation of the subaltern. Without being judgmental, she calls for the need “to attend to the complexity of issues at hand, as the only viable methodology for situating feminist textual studies” (14).

The various readings of the film Fire exemplify the paradoxes intrinsic to the representation of female sexuality. Brinda Bose’s “The Desiring Subject: Female Pleasures and Feminist Resistance in Deepa Mehta’s Fire” (2000) studies the contradiction inherent in the so called radical film Fire which, while raising an anti-patriarchal voice by portraying lesbian love, blunts its political edge by showing the relationship to be a result of deprivation from heterosexual
fulfillment. The scenario becomes clearer when we see the opinions of other equally well-known feminists on the same film. Whereas Madhu Kishwar finds the film “unexciting and pretentious” (2000: 521), Ratna Kapur and Carol Upadhya applaud it for its sexual politics and challenge to patriarchal hegemony (Kapur 2000; Upadhya 2000). These differences illustrate the ambivalent nature of representation once again. And the issue becomes more complicated when a self-proclaimed lesbian viewer assesses the film as “plastic” and blames Mehta for adopting a “politics of convenience” (V. S. 2000: 520). Exposing the director’s “hypocrisy” V. S. writes that whereas Mehta sold her product in the more “tolerant” West through Gay and Lesbian Channels, at home she explicitly denied that the film had a lesbian theme. According to her, “we have been rigorously exploited and commodified as subject matter” (519). Mary E. John and Tejaswini Niranjana in their ‘Introduction’ to “The Controversy Over ‘Fire’: A Select Dossier” (Part 1) (2000) have rightly observed that “the sharpest and most interesting debates … were not so much in opposition to the Hindu right and its attempt to appropriate Indian culture and womanhood, but amongst different sections of the women’s movement itself” (372). It again alludes to the “central contradiction” of feminist theory with regard to female sexuality (Kaplan 1986: 32).

All these works demonstrate that reading cultural representations in general and women and their bodies and sexuality specifically, is a complex affair. Simplistic textual analysis, in the form of power and submission, does not do justice to the plurality of the text. Establishing that these two are not mutually exclusive categories, these works, through the study of various cultural practices and fields, show that the scenes of production and consumption are equally
crucial. Moreover, female agency and acquiescence as depicted in representational discourse is an equally tricky area, constantly shifting positions. Just by virtue of being produced by women cultural products do not become emancipatory. Contradictions still remain. A sophisticated feminist literary analysis must keep these complexities in mind. As the discussion above has made obvious, many Indian feminist and cultural critics have applied this comprehensive framework in their critical studies. However, what is missing is such an approach to contemporary Indian English women’s writings that foregrounds active female sexuality. One of the reasons for this void is that the trend in question is comparatively new. But more than that, it is seen that Indian English women’s writing has not received serious critical attention till recent times. And now, when it has started getting critical attention, critics have confined themselves basically to textual analyses (Kuortti 2002). Most of the critical works, if these are monographs, are on individual authors. Edited books are rarely theme oriented. Thus, not even a single full-length study is available on the representation of the female body and sexuality in contemporary women’s fiction and the articles appearing here and there in journals and edited collections analyzing the female body as a site of women’s oppression and resistance as represented by women writers hardly do justice to the subject. These either celebrate the representation of active female sexuality as if that is enough to achieve feminist goals (Bose 2006; Harish 1999; Pathak 1999; Swain 1999) or just condemn such writings for being sensational and market-oriented (Ahmad 2006; Khan 1995; Bhaya Nair 1997; Uma 1996). In the exploration of other thematic concerns like East West encounter, the idea of self, feminist concerns, marital relationships, widowhood, tradition vs. modernity, nationalism, however,
corporeal issues are often just glossed over. The only work that fruitfully engages with the issues of the female body and sexuality is Malashri Lal’s *The Law of the Threshold: Women Writers in Indian English* (1995). But this work is not exclusively about it, and due to its vast scope hardly touches upon the *paradoxes* of the practice of “writing the body” in women’s fiction.

This dissertation is an attempt to enter this relatively unexplored space in the critique of Indian women’s fiction. It seeks to move beyond mere textual analyses and by underlining the inherent complexities of representing the narratives of sexually assertive women establishes that the feminist agenda of “writing the body” is not a guarantee of a more ‘tolerant’ society and ‘better’ living conditions. It does not, however, deny the ‘revolutionary’ nature of this ‘trend’ which despite having a very limited direct reach to the public (because of the medium and mode of communication), indirectly influences various other literary, cultural and mass media practices that exist in the same socio-historical conditions.

Before proceeding further it is necessary to clarify the terms in the title of my project. “Writing the body” is a phrase popularized by French feminists like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray in their proposition of the “*écriture feminine*. The practice of “writing the body” on the part of women, as espoused by the French feminists involves two aspects – writing ‘about’ the body and writing ‘through’ the body. According to Cixous and Irigaray, “Women, historically limited to being sexual object for men … have been prevented from expressing their sexuality in itself or for themselves” (Jones 1997: 371). For them writing about the body by women and for women would lead them to subjectivity and free them from the prison of object-status (Cixous 1997; Dallery 1990; Irigaray
Cixous's call for women is “Write yourself. Your body must be heard” (1997: 350). The second aspect that they concentrate on is writing “through” the body. For Cixous and Irigaray, writing through the body implies that just as female *jouissances* are scattered and not centered in one place as in the male body, women must practice this format in their writings as well. “Women must write *through* their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes,” (1997: 355 emphasis added) writes Cixous. According to these French feminists, women must write “without centre” and leave space for plurality and openness as this will present a resistance to the logocentrism and phallocentrism of patriarchal social discourses (Cixous 1997; Dallery 1990; Irigaray 1997; Jones 1997).

For this project I have adopted the term only in the first sense. This project does not concern itself with the idea of writing ‘through’ the body. Such writings have hardly been practiced by Indian writers, and I believe that in the present scenario of India would not be able to leave a political impact. I regard women’s writing about the female body, in itself, a political move and it is this aspect of representation which is the focal point of this project. In this work I have limited the discourse on body only to the aspects of sexuality, and pleasures and desires related to the same. By now body studies has become a rich area of inquiry and as mentioned above also includes studies of bodies as varied as the sick body, the maternal body, the aging body, the suffering body, the raped body, the coloured body, the mutilated body. Besides, the female body and its social existence have been dealt with through the lenses of colonization, nationalism, class, caste, religion, as well (Kapur 2005; Ktrak 2006; Sangari 1989, 1993; Tharu 1997). My focus in this sense is very limited and I have concerned myself
only with the intricate nature of resistance that surfaces when women as a matter of self representation write about the female body and its sexual desires.

By ‘contemporary’ I mean the post mid-eighties, the period which saw not only the influence of mass communication revolution, the greater dissemination of the body and sexuality discourses, but also witnessed the opening up of the Indian economy in post-1991 into the epoch of liberalization and globalization. These have all directly or indirectly contributed to popularizing and consolidating this trend of “writing the body.” The ‘paradox’ referred to in the title is the ‘essential contradiction’ in the practice of foregrounding the female body and sexuality in women’s writing – at once enabling and restrictive. It is this ambivalence between the progressive and the regressive which manifests itself at all the three levels of literary practice – representation, production and reception.

This dissertation is divided into five major chapters. The first chapter deals with the theoretical context of the project. Here the status of women and body in feminist discourses is highlighted. It goes on to elaborate upon the status of body in writing, what “writing the body” can mean and in what ways, when a woman writes the body, it is a resistant act. The last section of the chapter deals with the problem of defining and positioning resistance and agency in the feminist discourse. Whereas the feminist discourses on body and sexuality as well as female erotica have played an important role in the shaping of this study, reader response theories on the significance of the readers in ‘creating’ meaning, and Marxist ideas of the situatedness of ‘cultural production’ and the interplay of power between the dominant, residual and the emergent have been equally useful.
in appreciating the ambivalent nature of this practice of “writing the body” which
is both enabling and limiting as far as the feminist cause is concerned.

The second chapter contextualizes the contemporary trend of “writing the
body” in the larger socio-cultural framework of contemporary India and specially
the history of Indian English women’s fiction. One section is devoted to the
factors responsible for the upsurge of this trend in fiction writing while the
second focuses on the almost dramatic changes decipherable in contemporary
women’s fiction so far as the issue of representation of the female body and
sexuality is concerned. This chapter also sets the tone of the next three chapters
which focus on the three levels of paradoxes involved in this practice.

The third chapter deals with paradoxes inherent in the practice of
foregrounding the body at the level of representation. It looks at characters and
events ‘within’ the narrative. The chapter underlines how both ‘literary’ and
‘popular’ fiction by this representative group of writers significantly challenge
the patriarchal norms relating to the female body and sexuality, not only by
giving voice to women’s desires and pleasures but also by providing justification
for the same. The chapter also highlights that despite this resistance within the
narrative, moments of challenge and moments of submission frequently come
simultaneously. Thus, at the narrative level these works are paradoxical and the
reason lies in the choice of form which is realistic.

The next chapter deals with the paradoxes that emerge at the level of
production. Whereas there is no denying that when a women writer chooses to
foreground the female body and sexuality in a positive light it leads to the
creation of an alternative discourse; her writings remain wedged in the structures
and conventions of the language and the genre she uses. The first part of this
chapter looks at the 'limited' challenges the writers “writing the body” have posed to such structures and conventions. The other part of the chapter emphasizes how the location of these resistant writers within the capitalist structures put them in a double bind. Whereas in the present consumerist culture these writer’s dissenting voices have found space for articulation as never before, their simultaneous co-optation to the system that commodifies the female body can not be overlooked. The chapter underlines that it remains ambiguous as to how far the exercise of “writing the body” is counter hegemonic and to what extent these writers have been carried away by the ‘popular’ trend of foregrounding the female body and sexuality.

The last chapter deals with the paradoxes involved in the act of interpretation. Here my focus is on the reception of the novels. The success of “writing the body” depends on its transformative effects on the readers and society at large. However, the meaning of the texts is never fixed. The readers of the texts “writing the body” have differed widely in their opinion as to where and how a narrative celebrates or derogates the female body and sexuality. With the limited material available I suggest that as the same texts have been read differently by different readers, the affective potential of these novels “writing the body” remain uncertain.

The conclusion gives an overview of the study and points to further possible areas of study. It also emphasizes that even though paradox is very much a part of such representations, the existence of these narratives in itself is a positive signal.
Notes:

i. This 'provisional' distinction between 'literary' and 'popular' fiction has been made keeping in mind the difference of narrative techniques and language between the two. Whereas, generally the literary novels foreground its 'literariness,' the popular ones are for easy consumption. Unlike the traditional 'ideological' division between high and popular culture/art, this study has categorized the two for the sake of convenience. Despite the frequent overlapping between the two categories, I feel that the way these two 'types' are produced, marketed and received make them somewhat different from each other. However, I believe that both are equally significant cultural practices.

ii. Once regarded to be not good enough for serious critical concerns, Shobha De has, by now, gained acceptance in the academic world, be it because of her immense popularity or the dismantling of the barriers between high and popular literature. Already a part of the curriculum of Popular Culture in London University, she is now regarded as one of the important Indian English women novelists. Scholars have not only written articles on her fiction and her narrative style, socio-cultural concerns in her fictions have also been pursued as topics of study and research. R.K. Dhawan, ed. Indian Women Novelists (VII volumes) (New Delhi: Prestige) and Jaydipshinh Dodiya, ed. Shobha De: Critical Studies (New Delhi: Prestige, 2011) include several critical works on De. An updated list of the academic work done on De is available on — <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20061018233539AAnQo2y>.

iii. Shobha De’s novels are marked by her unique style that not only includes a specific subject matter pertaining to upper middle class women, but also her candid treatment of issues relating to sexuality. Her style has not been successfully adopted by any other woman writer in India. She is, thus, the only practitioner of “Shobha De style” of fiction writing. Further discussion on the matter is available at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?202032>.

iv. It may be noted that though in these genres the issues of female sexuality have been raised, the focus is mostly on its oppression rather than an open celebration. The works of Dina Mehta, Kamala Das, Poile Sengupta, Manjula Padmanabhan, Suniti Namjoshi frequently refer to the socio-cultural structures which do not
allow a positive expression of female bodily desires. Some of the works that illustrate the point are: Dina Mehta’s *Brides Are Not for Burning: A Play in three Acts* (Calcutta: Rupa, 1993) and *Getting Away with Murder* in *Body Blows: Women, Violence and Survival, Three Plays* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2000); Kamala Das’s *The Descendants* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1967); Poile Sengupta edited *Women Centre Stage: The Dramatist and the Play* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010); Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Harvest* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997); Suniti Namjoshi’s *Flesh and Paper* (with Gillian Hanscombe) (Seaton: Jezebel Tapes and Books, 1986).

v. Some of their plays that focus on such issues are: Girish Karnad’s *Bali: The Sacrifice* and *Naga-Mandala* in *Collected Plays* Vol. 1 (Delhi: OUP, 2005); Mahesh Dattani’s *Bravely Fought the Queen* in *Collected Plays* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2000); Vijay Tendulkar’s *Silence! The Court is in Session* and Kamala in *Five Plays* (New Delhi: OUP, 1992).


Stories (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996) is another instance of the audacious treatment of the female body and sexuality.


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39


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