



Female Body in Select Indian English Novels: Representations and Possibilities

Debabrata Sardar

An Assistant Professor of English at Baruipur College, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

Abstract: This paper attempts to highlight the tension lying between the lived bodily experiences of women, and the predefined cultural entanglements which condition and shape those experiences. Unlike men, women suffer much particularly for and with their bodies. This raises a crucial question regarding the ontology of their sufferings. Body, the biological location of humans distinguishes between the sexes and appropriates the cultural inscriptions. But how does the corporeality facilitates the conflation of chromosomal sex with the categories of gender? How do women relate to these entanglements and make sense of their bodies? A critical study of Indian English novels, from the mid-19th century to the successive periods, demonstrates how female body has been imagined and represented under the trajectory of such difficulties, and how in course of time these representations have changed. Interestingly, despite the palpable changes, one thing remains static – the disagreement between the lived experiences of women about their bodies and the way it is perceived in a given cultural situation.

Keywords: Abstraction, body, culture, gender, politics, sexuality.

Introduction

“As adult women, we have come to live under the terms of a widely accepted Body Myth: that the answer to life’s meaning and challenges lies in our body’s appearance.”

– *The Body Myth* by Margo Maine and Joe Kelly.

What Margo and Joe have highlighted here is indeed a grave existential concern for women across the generations. Female body is a biological dilemma for women, so to say. Their biological location (with the impossibility of ceasing to inhabit

it) is the source of their affliction. They too, like men exist through their bodies but unlike men, they confront multiple layers of difficulties due to their bodies. This cardinal distinction in the ways men and women exist and relate to the worlds around has transformed female body into a phenomenon of critical inquiry. In the post-Cartesian era any attempt to understand this distinction considers various types of dualisms that binarise the gender relations and relegate women to the secondary position in gender hierarchy. Under the binarisation of gender relations, women become, to use Elizabeth Grosz's observation, "more biological, more corporeal, and more natural than men". Body, thus is the central issue in the discussion of the ontology and subjectivity of women. Feminism, on many occasions presupposes the impossibility of female subjectivity without getting rid of their bodies. Cartesian dualism conflates woman with body and undermines their intellectual abilities. The conflation of man with mind and woman with body generates the discourse of embodied sex. What happens due to this, is the gross sexualisation of half of the population of the world. Women struggle hard to undo such bodies for a better existential experience. Even many feminist philosophers too advocate the need of getting rid of their bodies for re-gaining their alienated intellectual ability. This wish followed by various attempts to materialize that, I argue, only reinforces their problems. In this paper I will highlight the fallacy of this feminist understanding and will explain why women should actually retain the visibility of their bodies and should not enmesh themselves in the politics of body with reference to few well known Indian English novels. I will also elucidate how women's changed psychosomatic status addresses this paradox of feminist understanding.

Contextualising the Argument

A critical engagement with Indian English Novels since the publication of *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, records the precarious state of living that women are imported into due to their bodies. At the same time, it is not difficult to notice the shifting perceptions of women about their bodies during last three to four decades. The emergence of multiple discourses and counter discourses around female body during this time has changed the entire paradigm to the degree more complex than ever before. The phenomenon that has been existing as a passive recipient of cultural inscriptions so long has now started to refuse those appropriations with several forms of resistance from within. In a comparatively shorter span of time multiple phases of quick changes in the lives of women enabled by spread of education, new provisions in law, better access to and participations in public affairs etc. have altered their social status. The trajectory of this change has enormous impact on women's lives. Male gaze on female body and their awareness of it become one of the central issues in the discussion of gender relations. Women's varied means of responding to any kind of bodily oppression, especially with the emergence of psychoanalytical studies in India, produces the new narrative of 'feminist body politics'. 'Feminist body politics' considers the status of the individual woman as well as the location of women within the larger webs of power that both sustains its control over female body and evolves newer means of sexual politics. But the difficulty of this feminist critique of the power structure is that it is situated within other power relations like language, education, convention etc. under which the entire schema of female body operates. Ketu H. Katrak highlights this complex web of power relations in her book *Politics of the Female Body* (2006):

“Such theorizing of the body politics is located within the larger body politic which, after all, sustains systems of power.” (Kartak, 2006, p. 16)

Therefore, the feminist critique of the discourse concerning itself is not independent of the weakening forces without and for that matter is fragile from within. In a way, the challenge that feminism confronts for reconfiguring the body image is a potential internal resistance which Kartak terms as the “female responsibility”. The fallacy of feminist understanding concerning body that I wish to point out, in parts aligns itself with this “female responsibility”. Women internalize the concepts of ideal female beauty, bountiful giver, nurturer of the family etc. and get trapped within such concepts. I argue, behind their willing internalization of these values, besides patriarchal politics, remains women’s wish to get rid of their corporeal bodies. Cartesian dualism conflates men with mind and intellectual ability and binarises gender relations. As compulsory binary to men, women start to get identified with what men are not – absence of mind - bodies, an absence no less than Freudian absence of penis. The problem is that instead of creating their own independent ontology, on most occasions women attempt to get rid of the already existing location, mental or physical, that patriarchy thrusts them into. In the context of body problem too women get intrigued by the existing axiom of body mind dualism and intend to undo their visible bodies. The implanted somatophobia of women creates a schematic fallacy among them and becomes complicit with patriarchal politics. Female body loses its physical value and starts acting as a signifier of certain cultural codes and concepts. In the essay “Breaking out of Invisibility: Rewriting the History of Women in Ancient India” Uma Chakrabarty and Kum Kum Roy highlight how female body and sexuality get abstracted into certain values and shape their identity. They historicise the figure of Sita and show how her body

transforms into the concept of chastity. They mention that historically Sita's story -

“reveals that the emphasis on chastity and the assumption that ideal marriage is based on female devotion are aspects which were grafted onto an originally simple story. Over the centuries important details were added to the story and these had a crucial bearing on the shaping of feminine identity” (Chakrabarty and Roy, 1992, p.334). Like Chakrabarty, Shahshi Deshpande also focuses on the process of abstraction of female body. Both in a number of her essays published in the volume Writing from the Margin and Other Essays (2003) and in her fictions Deshpande highlights several aspects of how Indian myths sexualize women and destabilizes female solidarity against patriarchal oppression.

Female Body in Indian English Fictions

I will start my discussion of literary texts with how Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay presents his female characters, Matangini and her neighbour, Kanak in *Rajmohan's Wife*. The very first chapter describes Kanak as “a formidable champion of a world-conquering sex” (Chattopadhyay, 2009, p. 1). Two things are to notice here - the minute details of how Kanak, uses her toiletries and prepares herself before going to draw water from the river and how the narrator describes her appearance, which in turn reflects the common perception about women in mid 19th century India. These two different but interconnected aspects together construct Kanak's sexuality and presents it as a ‘formidable’, vicious object. Bankim's presentation of Kanak's bodily being as ‘formidable’, however, is not a view detached from the larger scheme of things and can be located within the trajectory of ‘body

politics'. It reinforces the long drawn alignment between female sexuality and evil whether in the figure of the mythological female devilry, or in the concept of Romantic 'femme fatale'. When the Fairy in Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" with her 'long hair' and 'wild eyes' captivates the Knight in perpetuity or when in D.G. Rossetti's sonnet "Body's Beauty" with her 'enchanted hair' Lady Lilith "Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave" they fall within the same category of diabolical beauty like Bankim's Kanak in *Rajmohan's Wife*. Mario Praz in his book *The Romantic Agony* (1933) while giving a detailed account of 'femme fatale' mentions that they "[...]successively incarnate in all ages and all lands, an archetype which united in itself all forms of seductions, all vices, and all delights"(Praz, 1933, p. 209). I wish to suggest that behind such presentation of Kanak's body and sexuality works the patriarchal methods of controlling female body through linking it with evil. Now, the politics is that the idea of female beauty is a patriarchal construct and it has to remain under the control of patriarchy only. So both the construction of and control over women's bodies complement each other. They are inseparable, operating as part of the same trajectory in a self reinforcing, circular manner. Considered from the Foucauldian perspective, this kind of construction and control are connected with 'power-knowledge' dyad. Production of female body and sexuality is a historical process. It follows the principles of andocentric knowledge which allows men the power to control it. As part of his concept of 'genealogy' Michel Foucault elaborates that sexuality, like many other aspects of human experience, is not outside the ambit of history. Therefore, the supposed formidability of Kanak's bodily being in *Rajmohan's Wife* and the implied idea of sexual aberration accompanying that formidability are to be located within the same process of genealogical development. It has a genealogical history that has evolved over the time and is still in a continuous process.

On the other hand, ‘the perfect flower of beauty’ (Chattopadhyay, 2009, p. 3), Matangini with her ‘land-lotus’ like beauty and ‘careless knot’ of locks is an example of the expression of controlled sexuality. She covers her face safely under veil, endures the physical and verbal abuses of her husband and makes emotional compromise with her feeling of love for Madhav. The striking aspect of Matangini’s sexuality is her perceived ambivalence. She risks her position as a housewife for the sake of her love for another man, but steps back to the sanctity of marriage knot once she is reminded of it by that man only. Matangini embodies this moral binary and makes it a part of her sexual dilemma.

This ambivalence of female sexuality, and the trope of ‘femme fatale’ in R.K. Narayan’s novels, works in a different way. Besides, different forms of female sexuality, not necessarily in terms of binary, emerge as part of the narrative and show how sexual heterogeneity can act as means of resistance of women to their bodily oppressions. Through Rangi, the temple dancer, in the novel *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1961) the novelist complicates the entire discourse of female body and sexuality. The novel, despite its emphasis on the peaceful lives of the people at Malgudi and the threatening presence of Vasu to destabilize that order of living, complicates the issue of female body and sexuality. The two most important female characters - Nataraj’s wife, an unnamed woman and Rangi, the infamous temple dancer - embody two different forms of sexuality. While Nataraj’s wife with her happy engagement in household activities is a dutiful wife, Rangi is a threat to both Nataraj and his wife in two different manners. Her status as a temple dancer decides how she talks, how she behaves and more importantly what she does with her body. A matrilineal descendant, Rangi inhabits a much liberal space usually denied to the women in a patriarchal structure:

“Padma was now retired being old, fat and frightening like the harm guards of Ravana, and

her daughter Rangi had succeeded her at the temple.” (Narayan, 2010, p. 115).

Therefore, her identity itself is a resistance to the cultural discourses that construct the sexuality of women. She belongs to Malgudi with Nataraj, Sastri, the poet and all other characters but at the same time occupies a social space somewhat different from theirs – a liminal existence. This exoticity constructs her sexuality. She has been defined variously – a ‘notorious character’ (115), a ‘perfect female animal’ (116), an ‘animated hyana’ (Narayan 154) and “there was an irresistible physical attraction about her[...]” because of which Nataraj fears that he “might succumb to her charms.” (Narayan, 2010, p. 154). For Nataraj she is a threat to his monogamous commitment which in turn proves his male desire to retain control female sexuality. On the other hand Nataraj’s wife is a prototype of 20th century Indian house wife – caring, self effacing and submissive. A perfect foil to Nataraj’s wife, Rangi with her overt physicality is another version of ‘femme fatale’. But Narayan’s presentation of fatal woman highly varies from Bankim’s presentation of the same. But in the presentations of both the writers defying female sexuality necessitates corrections – in *Rajmohan’s Wife* the means is sarcasm and in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* it is social stigma.

With such writings, there begins a phenomenal change, a noticeable shift in the way female body and sexuality is imagined in the literary texts. In Bankim’s novel *Rajmohan’s Wife* it just exists like a passive object, not aware of its inherent potentials. However, for the narrator, presumably a male, Kanak’s sexuality is ‘formidable’. Therefore, the male characters in the novel - Rajmohan, Madhab and Mathur try to retain their control over it in various ways. In Narayan’s *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* the temple dancer, Rangi is aware of the discrete status of her body but this relative autonomy is a given status, not acquired. She does not acquire control over her body and sexuality in the way Draupadi does in

Mahasweta's story, rather it is an arrangement made by patriarchy only to meet their sexual need beyond marital commitment. Acquired autonomy over body which Rangi lacks, can be traced in Mahasweta's story "Draupadi" published more than a decade after the publication of Narayan's *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. In my understanding this thematic metamorphosis is very remarkable.

The successive writers, particularly those writing after 1980s, explore numerous other aspects of female body in a more complex and nuanced manner. Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, and their contemporaries give an altogether different dimension to female bodily experiences. The reconceptualisation of female body in their writings is largely due to their inclination to the psychological lives of their female characters. As such, there comes a steady shift from the social to the psychological identity of women. Consequently, contemplation, emotion, introspection, memory, mental illness and such other components of a person's psychological life get more narrative exposure. It also necessitates a different narrative technique to effectively delineate the inner worlds of the female characters. The 'stream of consciousness' technique abundantly used by the European writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf becomes a popular method of narration among the writers of Indian English Literature. Use of chronotope and interior monologue as part of the new narrative technique unfolds the anxiety and dilemma of the female characters concerning their bodies. In many of her novels and short stories Shashi Deshpande has used such mode of narration so do Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and other contemporary writers. They all express their concerns about female bodily experiences; some go parallel to each other while some differ.

The oeuvre of Kamala Das's writings, particularly her memoir, *My Story* (1973) considers female body and sexuality in its multifarious being. It is one of the most controversial personal

accounts ever written in Indian English Literature. The controversy relates to the uninhibited expression of her inner life, ranging from the painful experience of marital rape to her multiple affairs and physical relations. She even remembers how her body was dragged under social disciplining with the attainment of puberty, how her grandmother would exhort her to apply turmeric on her body to brighten her complexion. Body, for Das has never been an object of shame or secrecy. Her open deliberation on bodily affairs is in complete disagreement with the lesson on body discipline that learnt in her adolescence. Her body became an alien object, something that she should be secretly aware of during adolescence. Through her writings she reclaims her body and breaks the meaningless silence around it. Her poems also reflect a lot on the expression of 'physicality' of women. Her poems - "An Introduction", "The Freaks", "In Love" – are such poems, written in a confessional tone, about a woman's perception of her own physicality - reaching adolescence, discovery of new bodily changes, simultaneous presence of the feelings of love and desire and more importantly the relation between the body she resides and society to which she spatially belongs. In the poem "The Introduction" Das remembers the compulsory control that her body and mind has to endure as part of her growing up experiences. The grueling memory being violated sexually leaves her indelible marks for her body to remember – "He did not beat me/ But my sad woman-body felt so beaten." In her writings, body emerges as a field of mediation between inner and outer worlds. The heterogeneous bodily experiences of women inform her writing ability and she explores multiple facets of female body through her writings.

Ismat Chughtai, almost contemporary to Kamala Das, explores multiple aspects of female body and sexuality through her short stories. She even considers the relations, usually looked upon as sexually profane in Indian society, as part of her imagination about the expression of female sexuality. The

relation between Begum Jaan and Rabbu in the story “The Quilt” is a narrative of same-sex desire in a conservative Muslim family. Indian English fictions are usually not that much overt about lesbian relations. For example, Shashi Deshpande’s short story “The Window” also presents the tale of homosexual relation between a middle aged single lady and the wife of her new tenant, but the expression is somewhat controlled and tacit. But Chughtai’s story elaborates on the unfulfilled bodily desire of Begum Jan, the protagonist of the story and her subsequent homosexual relation with Rabbu, her female attendant. The Nawab never feels driven to Begum Jan for his homosexual orientation and she has to remain sexually dissatisfied. A clear contrast to this can be noticed in Deshpande’s story ‘The Intrusion’ where the husband physically forces the wife just after marriage without giving her adequate time for mental and physical preparation. The husband in Deshpande’s story claims his due, right over the body of the wife. But in Chughtai’s story the husband does nothing to meet the bodily need of the wife. It rather is relegated to the dark secret space under the ‘quilt’.

When it comes to the novels of Anita Desai a different aspect of female body gets unfolded. It’s not an expression of alternative sexual orientation like the one found in Chughtai’s writings, neither is it overt as in Kamala Das’ *My Story*. Desai’s ideas about female body are rather more complex because it seeks to highlight certain bodily and sexual difficulties of women which are not usually considered sexual and therefore are more threatening to women. Such asexual aspects and the metaphysical musings of her female characters remain deeply informed in some way or the other by their bodily experiences. For example, Maya’s ability to appreciate the aesthetics of the peacock’s dance and the philosophical revelation about the ultimate union of life and death in *Cry, the Peacock* or Nanda Kaul’s desire for aloneness in *Fire on the Mountain* is clearly linked to their

bodies, although on the surface they seem have no relation with their physicality. The novel *Cry, the Peacock* presents the poignant story of Maya, an extremely sensitive and imaginative girl. Maya's incarceration in the world of fancy and her specific mode of response to the frenzied dance of the peacocks both are mediated by the ways that shape her sexuality. Her father has been caring and protective to her thoroughly, while her brother shares a different relational dynamics with him - a more liberal one. This constant care for and protection to the girl child to the degree of making her reliant on someone else is a typical means of patriarchy to discipline female body and sexuality. The girl child develops an infantile dependency for perpetuity. In Foucauldian sense of term, caring of this sort is a viable means of control. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975) Foucault observes how disciplinary power produces docile bodies and that caring is a component of disciplinary power. Maya in Desai's novel becomes conditioned by her father's care and control. Her father's care makes her ever dependent and her corporeal body fails to act independently. The psychological fantasy world of Maya takes her physical world under control and she fails to come out of it. On the contrary, her adult body needs sexual gratification which remains unattended. Gautama being an aged person and a believer of the doctrine of detachment preached by the *Gita* fails to respond to both the physical need and mental exuberance of Maya. Her minute narration of the aesthetics of the dance of the peacocks is induced by her unfulfilled bodily desire. I argue, her sexual dissatisfaction enables her in a different manner. Her ability to notice the behavioural patterns of the animals like peacock has a strong sexual orientation at the schematic level. Her sexual energy transcends bodily desires and stimulates her aesthetic sense and makes her aware of the actuality of life and death, the metaphysics that bring these two extremities together:

“Peacocks are wise. The hundred eyes upon their tails have seen the truth of life and death, and know them to be one. Living they are aware of death. Dying, they are in love with life.” (Desai, 1980, p.83)

Similarly, in *Fire on the Mountain* Nanda Kaul’s desire for aloneness, for spending her old age at Kasauli, away from the city and her family is also related to her body. Here geographical location, the space where her body belongs and the biological location, her physical body where Nanda Kaul as a distinct person belongs are critically linked together. She spends her entire life as a dependent housewife. Her husband, an independent person and Punjab University Vice Chancellor does little care for the individual need of Nanda. Like the female protagonist in the story “The First Lady” by Shashi Deshpande, she has to retain the appearance of a smiling and contented wife in the public domain, even at home where she lives with her husband and his family. Her intellectuality is denied by keeping her pinned to the domestic chores and she is reduced to an embodied existence only. Their married life hardly differs from what one experiences in a patriarchal family. Her own children also pay little attention to her. But the final emotional incursion that changes her inner being is her sudden discovery of her husband’s unfaithful nature. He maintains a relation with his university teacher Miss Davidson beyond her knowledge. This marital disloyalty, the sheer disrespect that her husband poses to their relation frustrates her immensely. Behind the narrative of a happy family life with affluence and social status, Nanda therefore, suffers for a number of reasons. She decides to leave the small town of Punjab where she has spent her entire life to settle down in Kasauli among wilderness at the foothill of the Himalayas. In my understanding, her migration from the physical space of her in-law’s home in Punjab to the calm seclusion of Kasauli is linked to her body. As a housewife her bodily chores and

compulsory wifely performances bruise her mind. The body that remains obedient to the need of the husband and his family does not allow any personal space for her there. The physical space where her body resides thus becomes a land of oppression. Her journey to Kasauli is more a metaphorical rejection than mere physical migration. She rejects the physical space that oppresses her and chooses complete aloneness among wilderness, in the company of nature, the entity outside the institution of family, the smallest social unit to legitimize patriarchy. She does not simply leave her in-law's home; with this she also rejects the patriarchal codes that define female body within the private world of family.

Exploitation of female bodies by patriarchy begins with the construction of the idea of female beauty. Both in her short stories and novels Shashi Deshpande presents this issue recurrently. Her short fiction "The Story" is a very significant piece of writing that focuses on the discourse of female beauty. A critical part of this discourse is its schematization of women's wish to be looked at. This uncontrolled consciousness about their beauty necessitates objectification of female body and sexuality. Written with somewhat historicomythical approach, this short story of Deshpande tends to delve deep and investigates the ways that lead to this idealisation and subsequent objectification of female body. She holds Indian myths responsible for this. Under the garb of a simple story told by a grandmother to her granddaughter, the narrative intends to excavate a number of critical issues ranging from the transformation of the society from egalitarian principles, man's quest for immortality to woman's role in fulfilling that quest by bearing children. In the 'Afterward' annexed to the collection of her stories "The Stone Women" Deshpande tells how she was prompted to write "The Story" under the influence of the myth of Laxmi:

"I opened thethe Kurma Avatar Chapter (The Bhagvat Purana). About the churning of the

ocean and of Laxmi who arose out of it, so beautiful that everybody 'desired her, gods, demons, mortals.' The perfect woman with perfect proportions. These came together in a story I call "The Story".

As she has mentioned here, in this story she has shown how history inscribes femaleness on the bodies of women. Idealised female body is actually historically created out of male fantasy and through the politics of language and sexuality it has been normalised to such an extent that women feel inspired to conform to that. They even shape themselves up following the predefined idealized body of women. Any deviation from that concept of idealized body is regarded as a physical lacking. But the story has more to offer. It features the women of three successive generations – the narrator, her daughter and her granddaughter. The narrator's daughter is physically absent from the entire narrative, but it is her absence that makes the story more meaningful. In the narrator's view this story should have been narrated to the young girl by her mother since it is to be handed down from the mother to the daughter, from one generation to another generation. But that does not happen and the grandmother narrates it to the young girl, thereby causing an unusual interruption to the anthropological principle of linear transmission of culture. The fact is that this interruption, as the narrator mentions, is also a part of the process:

"In fact, I think every woman must have put something of herself in the story. Don't you think so? Perhaps even your mother's silence is the part of this story." (Deshpande, 2004, p.168)

Ideal female body is a concept that keeps on transforming spatially and temporally. Each generation of woman contributes to this constant flux. But the basic idea remains the same – internalization of certain principles. This

internalization happens under the imperatives of gender politics. In this story the narrator's daughter does not accept this internalization and therefore she does not participate in the chain of intergenerational transmission of internalized values. Her refusal to participate in the process is also a part of the flux, since it occurs within the same social matrix. The argument is that even when women try to keep away from idealization, the very attempt only reinforces the long drawn process. An attempt to de-idealise female body strengthens the process of idealization only.

Another story "The Stone Women" by Deshpande considers the same strain of thought, but in a different manner. In the story a newly married couple went on a trip to the Chennakeshava Temple at Belur in Karnataka. The sculptures on the walls of the temple displaying "lush bodied, high breasted, dancing women' (Deshpande 2003, p.71) cast a spell of wonder on the female protagonist. While her husband is grossly amazed at the appeal of those figures she grows introspective and feels a suffocating uneasiness. She goes on thinking –

"But it's not these details in the carvings that I find amazing, it's what we are seeing here – the joyous, playful, narcissistic existence of these women. Were women ever like this? Could any woman have been like this?" (Deshpande, 2003, p. 72)

She finds a huge disagreement between the joyful mood of women carved on the walls of the temple and the actual state of women in the society. Ontologically, those 'stone women' as a form of mimetic representation mediate between the 'real and imagined women' to use the expression used by Rajeswari Sundar Rajan in her book *Real and Imagined Women: Gender Culture and Postcolonialism* (1993) They do not essentialize the 'real', neither do they entirely dismiss the

cultural inscriptions on those stone images. Interestingly, therefore, those cultural representations themselves embody the possibility of unmaking the ‘imagined’ body of women. The “heavy oppressive weight that threatens to suffocate” (Deshpande, 2003, p. 73) the female protagonist of the story was due to her understanding of the unreality of those ‘imagined’ bodies, the impossibility of reconciliation between those ‘stone women’ and women as they actually are. The protagonist of the story, the newly married woman becomes aware of the process constructing female body only when her husband intends to become physically intimate with her:

‘His hands moving as if tracing the shape of my body’ (Deshpande, 2003, p. 75). What follows is an epiphanic realization. The making of ‘imagined’ female body gets unfolded to her:

“This is how they must have looked, I think, the men who sculpted the women in stone, as they shaped them from their imagination...working out from their fantasies in it, creating women with unreal bodies, women who played and sang and danced all day.” (Deshpande, 2003, p. 75)

Conclusion

Indian Writing in English, as it stands today, is a vast reservoir of literary and nonliterary texts that can address these enormously complex and widely varied bodily experiences of women. It is interesting to notice the shifting ideas about female body as presented by the Indian writers over the years. The abstractions, passivity, naivety that female body would signify in the writings before 1970s or 1980s, gradually take a new direction. The writers have imagined numerous other ways for female body to exist; explored the

possibilities of unmaking and remaking of it. The nascent changes, so to say, have been complemented by an upsurge in the study of psychoanalysis as a field of critical inquiry after Independence. Though under the aegis of Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, the then Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University, Psychology as an independent subject was introduced at the post graduate level in the year 1905, it gained relevance in the socio-cultural field of India only after 1950s when other Indian Universities also started to offer the course and the works like *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* etc. gained popularity as part of academic discussions. Within two to three decades human behaviour, nature of interpersonal relations, importance of mental care etc. became the subjects of nonacademic discussions too. The researches and publications of Sudhir Kakar, Rajeswari Sundar Rajan, Dr. V. Mohini Giri, Geetanjali Gangoli, Nivedita Menon and other Indian scholars create a parallel space for the feminist psychoanalytical studies in the Indian context. All these together bring a paradigmatic change in the ways of understanding female body and sexuality. Given the emergence of this new ways of understanding female body, the tendency, now, is not to shy away from one's body but to get more integrated in it which may enable women to become bodily independent individuals, not as part of the sexual binary. Like Luce Irigaray's multi subject position as found in her essay "The Question of the Other", a shift is nascent in Indian feminist understanding that speaks of independent bodily experience of women and the writings of Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Mahasweta Devi and others highlight that new possibility.

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Debabrata Sardar

Debabrata is an Assistant Professor of English at Baruipur College, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India. He is an independent scholar, and has participated and presented research papers in many national and international Seminars/Webinars. He has also published research papers in a number of national and international journals. His area of interest is Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, Critical/ Literary Theories.

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