

**Interrogating the Politics of Gendered Space: Reading  
Select Indian Women Detective Fictions in English**

A Thesis Submitted

To

**Sikkim University**



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the  
**Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**By**

**Priyanka Chatterjee**

Department of English

School of Languages and Literature

Gangtok, Sikkim- India 737101

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सामदुर, तादोंग -737102  
सिक्किम, भारत  
03592-251212, 251415, 251656  
-251067  
- [www.cus.ac.in](http://www.cus.ac.in)



6<sup>th</sup> Mile, Samdur, Tadong -737102  
Gangtok, Sikkim, India  
Ph. 03592-251212, 251415, 251656  
Telefax: 251067  
Website: [www.cus.ac.in](http://www.cus.ac.in)

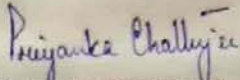
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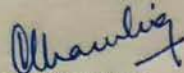
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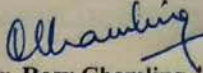
  
(Priyanka Chatterjee)

Roll No: 17PDEN03

Registration No: 17/Ph.D/ENG/01

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**Dr. Rosy Chamling**  
(Supervisor)

  
**Dr. Rosy Chamling**  
(Head of the Department)

अध्यक्ष  
Head  
अंग्रेजी विभाग  
Department of English  
सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय  
Sikkim University

अध्यक्ष  
Head  
अंग्रेजी विभाग  
Department of English  
सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय  
Sikkim University

साम्दुर, तादोंग -737102  
सिक्किम, भारत  
592-251212, 251415, 251656  
-251067  
- [www.cus.ac.in](http://www.cus.ac.in)



6<sup>th</sup> Mile, Samdur, Tadong -737102  
Gangtok, Sikkim, India  
Ph. 03592-251212, 251415, 251656  
Telefax: 251067  
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I recommend this thesis to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

**Dr. Rosy Chamling**

(Supervisor)

अध्यक्ष  
Head  
अंग्रेजी विभाग  
Department of English  
सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय  
Sikkim University

**Dr. Rosy Chamling**

(Head of the Department)

अध्यक्ष  
Head  
अंग्रेजी विभाग  
Department of English  
सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय  
Sikkim University

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**Reading Select Indian Women Detective Fictions in English”**

submitted by **Priyanka Chatterjee** under the supervision of **Dr. Rosy Chamling**,  
**Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, School of Languages and  
Literature, Sikkim University.**

*Priyanka Chatterjee*  
Signature of the Scholar  
(Priyanka Chatterjee)

*Alhauqig*  
Countersigned by Supervisor

अध्यक्ष  
Head  
अंग्रेजी विभाग  
Department of English  
सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय  
Sikkim University

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## SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

It is quite impossible to remain oblivious to the enchantment of the genre of detective fictions whose popularity has been unparalleled within a wide range of readership. The fluid possibilities of the genre which allows it to become a potential platform for different kinds of narrative strategies, makes the genre a viable space to dwell upon notions of crime, violence, morality, social structures, cultural paradigm and political conditions. The flexibility embedded in the character of the genre confers it with the potential to converse with various locations and spaces, allowing indigenisation of the genre. This process of indigenisation makes the genre a veritable platform for launching interrogations pertaining to social, cultural and political categories which become instrumental in conferring the genre with complexities pertaining to specificities.

While India has always had a tradition of crime narratives, the corpus of detective fictions had been imported in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from European corpus of detective fictions, mainly English and French. However, the detective novel, which proliferated in regional languages, mainly Bengali, Hindi and Urdu initially, in India, was thoroughly indigenised by ideologies that could appeal to a local audience. This has made the Indian corpus of detective fictions a burgeoning board of experimentation and consumption since more than a century now. It is quite strange that despite such a tradition of experimentation, Indian detective fictions have remained quite obscure from critical and academic engagements, which have been occasional and more concerned with male figures of the detective which have reached a cult status. The female figure of the detective seems to remain obscure, not only from academic engagements, but also from being reckoned within the Indian market of consumption of detective fictions, despite her presence in the canon since a long time now. The recent trends in the Indian English detective fictions have witnessed a rise in women writers writing women detectives, although they are yet to be received critically, and also in terms of popularity. What could be the reason for such apathy towards women detectives? Can it be related to the very idea of the detective, the very workings of the genre which has been considered in conducive to women being the protagonist/detective? Can such a constriction have something to do with the realm of social, cultural politics of the space within which the genre was indigenised? How,



then, can a woman detective be imagined in such a scenario? What kind of negotiations must have gone into the making of such a figure and what are the negotiations which are still going on? With such questions in mind, the present research intends to investigate into the formation and evolution of the Indian women detectives created by Indian women writers by focussing on select women's detective novels from the Indian canon of detective fictions.

As Indian detective fictions had been significantly influenced by the European models, it is considered impossible to discern the canon of Indian detective fictions as distinct from the core. But since the very nature of detective fiction allows it malleability to blend into the socio-cultural and political framework of the location it travels to, detective fictions often exhibit distinctness from the core emanating from such embedding. The corpus of Indian detective fictions is, therefore, more than such a branching out from the core as it has evolved through the years in both regional languages and Indian English. Indian women's detective fictions by women writers seem to emanate from an understanding of women's position within the Indian socio-cultural political framework. This makes the corpus compulsively distinct from the core English novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century featuring women detectives and written by women writers. While comparisons between the two corpuses is not within the purview of this research, an investigation into the socio-cultural and political reasons for the coming up of the women detectives in Indian women detective fictions definitely is. Again, since detective fictions have flourished, firstly in regional languages, and more recently, in Indian English, an examination of the evolution of the woman detective makes it imperative to focus on regional works, which have been existing since around 1940s, along with the very recent ones in Indian English. While this allows the research to dwell on multiple sites of contestation and compliance that goes into the making of the subjectivity of the woman detective, it also reveals the politics and patterns of culture that the corpus must negotiate with, which might be unavailable if the corpus is considered in only one language. As such the research focuses on select Indian women detective fictions written by Prabhavati Devi Saraswati (detective, Krishna Choudhury), Suchitra Bhattacharya (detective, Pragyaparamita Mukherjee), Kishwar Desai (detective, Simran Singh), Madhumita Bhattacharya (detective, Reema Ray) and Kalpana Swaminathan (detective, Lalli). The women detectives studied in the research are all middle class urban women which allow the

research to delve into the complexities evolving out of such a positioning, which in turn finds reflection in understanding women subjectivities by decentering it from a preordained monolithic idea. This understanding develops its contours by examining the categories into which Indian women detective fictions are thoroughly imbricated. These are the institution of family, which is considered as their natural domain, the institution of nation, negotiating with whose standards of recognition allows them to emerge as political subjects, the institution of the public domain of work which continuously makes them interrogate the distinctions conferred to the understandings of public and private domains in women's lives. Besides, the examination also probes into the complicated idea of violence which conditions the lives of Indian women most provocatively. However, instead of dwelling on the idea of physical or direct violence, the research examines violence as an everyday affair, as a continuum, as something that forecloses possibilities and continuously changes forms, but not its targets and effects. The research also tries to unpack the structured ideas of nation, family and work to comprehend the meanings which become attached to such ideas through their negotiations with a woman detective. In the course the research intends to reach to an understanding of the aspects that collate to inform the women subjectivities of the women detectives vis-à-vis the meanings they render to the genre of detective fiction, especially the Indian canon.

The research traces its path through the following six chapters:

Chapter 1, **Introduction**, foregrounds the need for engaging with the genre of detective fictions critically by considering three factors: firstly, that the corpus of detective fictions in India involves, besides Indian English literatures, a wide and complex variety of *bhasha* literatures which can foster a differential comprehension of the genre, opening up immense possibilities of exploration into the social, cultural and political embedding that informs the genre and its characters; secondly, that the dynamics involved in the production and dissemination of detective fictions as a cultural product allows mapping how genre fictions like detective fictions converse with the local socio-political and cultural settings in order to create its readership; thirdly, that the genre can be considered as contributing to the larger comprehension of South Asian literatures. Using these discussions as a pretext the chapter reviews existing literatures in order to locate the gaps which make the intention of studying

women writers and their women detectives in the Indian canon viable. The research investigates the corpus to comprehend the evolution of women subjectivities by evaluating contingent moments of emancipation as the woman detective negotiates with the categories of nation, family, work and violence by contesting and complying with these gendered categories as these continue to pervade Indian women's subjective positions. Employing ideas of intersectionality, the research tries to understand how these categories contribute to identity formation, a certain view of the world by women, and also try to understand their vision for a future. However since identity, subjectivity, personhood, and such ideas seem to become too idealistic when taken out of context and also when considered to evolve through radically positivistic graph, the research also follows a contextualist or extrinsic approach to evaluate the social, political and cultural contexts of text production as well as characterization. Locating the text within its context, and in fact, reading the text as a social text, would allow us to analyse the conditions of the emergence and existence of the woman detective, whose idea is definitely embedded in social and cultural relationships and structures which both enable and constrain her.

Chapter 2, **Situating Detective Fictions in the Indian Past: Traversing the Possibilities of a Woman Detective**, dwells on the history of the formulation of the canon of Indian detective fictions during the colonial period when there was a burgeoning market of regional detective fictions, especially Bengali. The research tries to fathom the reasons behind the masculine conditioning of the detective figure by situating its production vis-à-vis the nationalist movement, which also allows the chapter to comprehend the ways by which women could occupy the pages of detective fictions during this time. As the chapter moves into analysing the constricted roles of women within these fictions, the chapter also does not lose cognizance of the fact that women were emerging as political subjects and as writers which would eventually affect a change.

Chapter 3, **Voices made themselves heard: How the Woman Writer thinks the Woman Detective**, foregrounds the need to contextualise women subjectivity within a specific socio-political location in order to avert possibilities of general reduction of woman as a historical category. Instead the chapter fosters the need for understanding women as a historical category which is affected by the contexts in

which they are placed. Thus the chapter analyses the various dimensions of women's movements in pre and post- Independence India which seem to have contributed immensely in making the woman writer intervene and strike at the male citadel of detective fictions.

Chapter 4, **An unsuitable job for Indian women? Indian women detectives negotiating gendered spaces**, further dwells into the act of writing novels by Indian women writers which provides them with the space and the scope for interrogating the given in their socio-cultural and political understanding of the contexts in which they are placed. Being imbricated within their contexts, a dispensation with gendered experience of their lives seems impossible for the women writers, which definitely finds expression in their works. Women writers of women detectives also display influences of such experiences as they negotiate with the categories of nation, family and work, which become indispensable in comprehending Indian women subjectivities. The chapter explores how the subjectivity of the urban middle class woman detective fashions itself through a self-reflective agentiality which allows her to renegotiate her stand within these constricting, gendered structures, which, of course, she redefines.

Chapter 5, **The Vocabulary of Violence: Reading Indian Woman Detective Fictions**, investigates how the Indian women writers have dealt with the changing forms of violence which remain embedded within the narrative structure of these detective fictions. The chapter explicates how the idea of violence and just world plays itself in the narrative structure of these detective fictions, and analyses the complexities which emerge when the detective is a woman. The chapter premises its argument by reading into the idea of violence, its workings and attributes, which allows us to understand how, instead of being an aberration, or an event, violence is constantly present and plays its role in our everyday realities as a continuum, as a category that forecloses possibilities, as something which perpetually generates fear through the discourses of shame, disrespect, weakness. Since Indian women's detective fictions have been continuously interrogating the given in the socio-cultural and also in the narrative fabric of the genre, it becomes interesting to examine how it deals with the various forms of violence, a category which is intricately linked to both women and detective fictions, and emerges with the idea of politics of pain that tries to suture gaps through the building of empathetic solidarities.

Chapter 6, **Conclusion: Gendering the genre where the Gender is Woman**, draws a conclusion by focusing on the various findings of the research which allow a comprehension of the evolving subjectivities of the women detectives. The chapter foregrounds the woman detective as a liminal subject who is positioned at the threshold of the public and private dichotomy, as a risk-taking subject who lays a demand on state machinery to create avenues for women to take risks within the structures that inform the state, as a subject with self-referential agency which opens up possibilities to look beyond the construct of one's class structures, and forge empathetic solidarities in conditions of exclusion, marginalization, and a state of hurt.

## Chapter – 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1. Crime fiction<sup>i</sup>: A novelty in Indian Literature?

It is the paradox of the mystery novel that while its structure will seldom if ever stand up under the close scrutiny of an analytical mind, it is precisely to that type of mind that it makes its greatest appeal.... Since its form has never been perfected, it has never become fixed. The academicians have never got their dead hands on it. It is still fluid, still too various for easy classification, still putting out shoots in all directions (Chandler<sup>ii</sup> 70).

The sense of relief in Chandler's proclamation- 'the academicians have never got their dead hands on it'- alongside his observation that mystery novel appeals only to 'an analytical mind' can certainly be the cause of unease for a researcher trying to compile a thesis on the genre of detective novel. What could have Chandler meant? That academicians do not possess potent analytical minds to delve into the genre, or that the analytical minds of academicians which, for Chandler, can expunge life out of anything, have luckily not turned to the genre? While it is better to allow the former reason some dubious space, especially at the very outset of a research such as this one, the latter reason seems to invite some scrutiny. The unease for a researcher working on the Indian canon of detective fictions seems to intensify when her search for what such 'dead hands' might have done to enliven the complexities of a genre, which has been part of Indian literary narratives since times immemorial, brings before her a small, scattered, occasional body of works, instead of prolonged engagements. It is, then, that the fluid possibilities of the genre, 'putting out shoots in all directions', as Chandler remarks, its potential to lend a platform to different forms of narrative strategies, its continuous involvement with the notions of crime, violence, justice, morality, and its uncontested popularity among readers worldwide definitely provide grounds. It is more so when this canon to begin an investigation into the complications of the Indian corpus of the genre, which has been witness to a burgeoning board of experimentation and consumption since more than a century now.

Sukumar Sen<sup>iii</sup>, in what may be discerned as the first successful attempt to chronicle the history of detective fictions in India, mainly Bengal (Dasgupta<sup>iv</sup>, 'Introduction', vol.1), identifies Vedic literature as the first identifiable source of crime

narratives in both prose and poem (Sen 13). His research shows that the words ‘detective’ and ‘criminal’ have had their corollary words in the Vedic era, and ancient literatures, like the Rig Veda, Vedic prose narratives and *puranas* display enough proof of stories which follow narrative structures corresponding to contemporary detective novels (Sen 15-21). In 1812, William Carey, a padre from Serampore, had published a collection of oral tales, among which were some detective stories, like ‘*Chordhorae Bahaduri*’ (‘Bravery in Thief-catching’), where the skills of the detective figure, although not well-structured, could correspond to Dupin, though the figure preceded Dupin in time (Sen 14). Indian narratives, in both their oral and written forms, have been obsessed with crime and its implications which seem to have emerged as a corollary to their engagement with morality and dharma. However, it may be deduced from the narrative structures of these earlier tales that the idea of the detective, criminal, detection were not novelties when, at the end of the nineteenth century, the modern form of detective stories was seemingly imported to India, mainly from Europe. In fact, Sen, points out how the interesting dualities of the detective and criminal, as the mirror image of each other, could be found in the tales of Muldev and Mandeo<sup>v</sup>, which could also be associated to duos like Holmes and Moriarty (36). The collection of folk tales in Arabic language, which is popular as *Arabian Nights*, also contains some exquisite crime narratives whose structures, according to Sen, might have inspired French *littérateur*, Voltaire, to create Zadiq, who is considered to bear the seeds of the modern day European detective (44). Thus, the Zadiq tales are a conglomeration of Asian, Egyptian and European tales (ibid: 44), which not only point at the multifarious origins of the genre of detective fictions, but also indicates its embeddedness in a variety of local narrative forms which seem to have comingled to inform this travelling genre<sup>vi</sup>. In fact, Sen opines, that Marjeena, the maid, from the *Arabian Night*’s tale, “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves” can be regarded as the first woman detective because of her skills displayed throughout the story (46).

While such a history as woven through these earlier crime narrative cannot be ignored when tracing the evolution of detective fictions in India, it is the narratives which emerge after the establishment of police system in the country, around 1830s, which may be regarded as bearing representative elements of the form of detective fiction (Sen 146). This form which was being practiced in English and French literatures since the mid-nineteenth centuries have, without doubt, influenced the

emergence of the formal detective stories in Indian languages. The establishment of the policing system was of immense significance as it led to the creation of *darogas* who were required to relieve the country from a secretive, fearless, scheming, atrocious community of miscreants called the thugs who had been one of the strongest impediments for the British to establish their supremacy over the country. The *darogas*, recruited for the repression of the thugs and also to maintain the peace and security of country, came up with resplendent tales of their experiences which formed the rich oeuvre of *daroga* tales, from where detective fictions gathered ingredients. While *The Confession of Meajahn Darogah of Police* (1869) is considered as the first of such collection of tales by a Bengali *daroga*, there were a few others like *Pulish o Lok Rokhya* (1892) by Ramakhya Chattopadhyay, *Sekaler Goyenda Kahini* (1893) by Girishchandra Basu, *Bankaullar Daftar* (1896) by Kaliprashanna Chattopadhyay (Sen 138; Dasgupta 'Introduction', Vol. 1). Besides, there were books written in English: Major H.M. Ramsay's *Detective Footprints in Bengal 1874-1881 with Bearings for a Future Course* (1882) and R. Reid's *Everyman His Own Detective! In IV parts complete in one volume* (1889) (Sen 150; Dasgupta, *Introduction*, vol.1). R. Reid also published two more books: *Revelations of an Indian Detective* (1885) and *Reminiscences of an Indian Detective* (1886) (Dasgupta, 'Introduction', vol.1). The next phase of detective stories, as produced in Bengal, could be divided into two parts: *daroga* tales and *goyenda*, or detective stories, which included either direct translations of English or French detective stories as they were consumed by the English reading and writing generation of middle and upper class Bengali *bhadralok*, or tales in which the local figure of the detective emerged (Dasgupta, 'Introduction', vol.2). The next decade or two can be considered as one of the most productive periods of detective fictions in Bengali, and also in other Indian languages. Detective fictions in regional languages gained a stronghold, not only among the ever-increasing readers but also in the expanding set of writers. Urdu crime fiction, according to Daechsel<sup>vii</sup>, had become an established genre by 1930s where publications comprised of fully acknowledged translation, unauthorized renditions, adaptation of existing literature along with indigenous writings (23). The genre also existed in Hindi from the 1890s. The success of detective fictions lies not only in its formal adaptability of structures or its amiability to translation, but also in its penchant to closely blend with the social, cultural, political and literary board of a region, a major cause of its popularity in the Indian literary



scene at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, the genre has been constantly transacting with the changes that appear in the socio-political and cultural spectrum of India. However, such a burgeoning field has suffered from the persisting neglect of academia which not only informs the viability of the present research, but also calls for a curious delving into the possible reasons for such neglect.

### 1.2. Missing negotiations: Indian crime fictions and the ‘dead hands of academia’

As it is impossible to be oblivious of the reach and impact of crime fictions and detective fictions, contemporary syllabuses may be found to have incorporated an academic study of these fictions, and also their associated non-fictions. However, both forms seem to have a bias towards the Western canonical texts and authors<sup>viii</sup>, while the huge diversity of the Indian corpus of the genre still remain overwhelmed by the shadow of their western ‘masters’. The complexities embedded within the history of evolution of the genre, such as how the production and consumption of detective fictions in Bengal was intertwined with the rising urban, western educated, middle class *bhadralok*, does not seem to garner ample attention within Indian academia. It may be presumed that such reluctance is premised on the debates that have been consistently waged against the qualitative difference between so-called literary genres and commercial genres, although, as Dasgupta suggests, none of the genres could ever remain oblivious of each other and would be at loggerheads over issues of ethics and morality (‘Introduction’, Vol.2). Suman Gupta<sup>ix</sup> argues that both the terms are market endowed terms created to suit the requirements of the market (46). Khair<sup>x</sup> explicates how long before such novels found places within the collections of elites, detective novels could be found in bus stops and railways stations, being adjudged as travel companions which could be indulged in for short term pleasures (60). With the growth of circulating libraries, which could lend individual volumes of books to readers, the genre of pulp fiction and serialized novels in the genre of detective fiction, horror and gothic fiction proliferated (Khair 60) which, it seems, while allowing the genre some space in so-called cultured circles, kept the qualitative versus quantitative debate alive.

Neele Meyer<sup>xi</sup> in her extensive research on the circulation of crime fiction in the global south (mainly India and Latin America) considers crime fiction a ‘glocal genre’ as the genre clearly manifests an underlying tension between its identifiable European roots and its transmutation by indigenous authors to fit into local settings and contexts

worldwide (21). While this idea roots crime fiction in Europe, and considers the ‘other’ transmutations as mere branches, it also points at flexibility in genre conventions as it came into being, which might be the reason for the continuous experimentation within the genre at local and global levels. It might also account for the consistent boom and popularity of the genre in India, while making the academic lackadaisical towards it quite enigmatic, therefore. Trying to reason out the need for an engagement with the genre, as this research expects to do, seems to lead us towards certain issues for consideration: firstly, understanding the Indian corpus of genre fictions which involves, besides Indian English literatures, a wide and complex variety of *bhasha*<sup>xii</sup> literatures and how such an understanding might enable to foster a differential comprehension of the genre and its importance; secondly, the dynamics involved in the production and dissemination of the variants of genre fictions in the publishing markets, with close reference to India, to understand how these affect the comprehension of genre fictions like detective fictions; and thirdly, how the idea of South Asian literatures might itself require a refurbishment to be able to increase critical engagements with the genre.

### 1.2.1. Indian Genre Fictions: Why look into the possibilities of detective fictions?

John Frow<sup>xiii</sup> considers ‘genre’ as a “universal dimension of textuality”, which “actively generate(s) and shape(s) knowledge of the world”, thus opening up avenues to comprehend how “generically shaped knowledges are bound up with the exercise of power” (2). Thus, genre tends to become “a form of symbolic action”, affecting reality and truth, authority and plausibility, which form the core of understanding how the world operates in different ways of writing history, philosophy, science, painting, or even, everyday talk (ibid: 2). There is a symbiotic relationship between genres which most often allows them to dissolve margins and edges, stressing upon the open-endedness of generic frames, and also the fluid and unfixed structures (ibid: 3). Genres also orient the readers towards a certain framework for interpreting a text which might become prescriptive, allowing the conceptual shape of the genre to be precisely determined by the need it must serve, which, in turn, can become conventionalized over time and become deemed as a natural character of a genre (Meyer 48). Brigit Neumann and Ansgar Nunning also state that genres do not emerge in isolation but in a complex field of tensions and power relations depicting and negotiating with social contradictions or responses to cultural necessities (qtd. in Meyer 49). Hence while

generic conventions provide a certain framework for the orientation of the readers as well as the writers, this predictability tends to become the only recognizable character of the genre, which becomes criticized and sets genre fictions in opposition to literary fictions, although the entire process indicates the making of a construct.

Literary genres are generally perceived as one of the most frequent and important ways to organize literary texts on the basis of commonalities in terms of their forms, functions, structures or content (Frow 8). Genre fiction refers to “a collection of motifs” which goes on to apply to a constellation of narrative forms - like science fiction, fantasy, detective fiction, romance, thriller (Chattopadhyay et.al. 2)<sup>xiv</sup>. While the terms ‘popular fiction’, ‘pulp’, and ‘genre fictions’ are often used interchangeably because of the slippages that might occur within the genre conventions, sometimes such labels are also based on cheap publishing quality which reveal the deeper biases associated with genre literature itself as being fundamentally trivial- a literature that is voraciously consumed by unidentified mass (ibid: 2). Again, biases against genres exist not only between the genres identified as literary and popular, but also between “English language production and its elite or upwardly mobile readership and *bhasha* genre literatures” with their less cosmopolitan readership (ibid: 3).

In this context, Chattopadhyay et al. bring forth the idea of ‘container principle’ of Alexander Klose to understand the term ‘genre’ as a container. Genre remains a container irrespective of what is put into it; but draws its identity as a container to the extent that something is put into it; again, its identity also depends on what that something is (qtd. in Chattopadhyay et. al. 3). Chattopadhyay et al. also bring up the idea of ‘mass cultural genre system’ forwarded by John Rieder to understand the working of genre fictions. According to Rieder, genre fictions cannot be categorized as a narrative form alone, but must be understood as a production which is based on “new ways of publication and distribution, and appealing to a different readership, which also engages with the text in different and new ways” (qtd. in Chattopadhyay 3). Thus, Rieder argues for a historical interpretation of production and dissemination processes in order to understand how new technologies of visualization and a shift towards mass reproduction could actually interpret the formulaic ways in which many genres are recycled and share plots, tropes, motifs, suggesting the use of ‘popular’ or ‘mass cultural’ as an alternative label for genre fiction (ibid: 4). The image of popular

literature as projected through Rieder's analysis is summarized as, "Printed on pulp paper with often lurid covers, appealing to the sense of the comfortable and the familiar rather than to highbrow literary values, offering a vision of- often illicit- possibilities of vicarious pleasure" (ibid: 4). However, such a description, Chattopadhyay et. al. argue, might not wholly suit the rubric of popular literature when one tries to apply it in the Indian context, where, say a genre like science fiction, is not only produced through a select "authorial and readerly network" (ibid: 4), but whose narrative structures negotiate with the utopic vision of a better world by relating it to history and the present. Moreover, it might not be designated as 'mass cultural' because, although it bears the marks of the same crucible from which detective and fantasy fictions emerged, science fictions had never had the kind of popularity in India which the former enjoy. Science fiction emerged as part of a nationalist exercise and being positivist to the core, it aimed at dissemination of new knowledge to a pliable, younger audience, which ultimately changed the future of the genre in India. While science fictions in the Anglo-American world became a mature genre with the passage of time, in India it became a genre predominantly written for children and young adults. Detective fictions in India also seem to shift sides. From being popular as a genre of adult/mature fictions at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was later taken up by prolific writers like Satyajit Ray and Suchitra Bhattacharya to foster an engagement with young adults, therefore, bearing educational motifs, a sense of adventure, and also becoming a repository of the diverse cultures and traditions of India and the world as part of their narrative frame<sup>xv</sup>. While such forms of detective fictions garnered immense attention, the mature/adult content in these fictions seemed to be sidetracked as grossly sexual, thus creating a doubtful ambience for critical engagement with the genre.

Moreover, Indian genre fictions are categorically influenced by indigenous roots and traditions which often thwart expectations of various genres, making them divergent from their Western counterpart. Chattopadhyay et al. opine that Indian genre fiction cannot be seen as literature fostering escapism or as purely entertaining. Displaying the propensity to defamiliarise themselves with the expectations evolving out of genres, genre fictions have the potency to "continuously reshape the boundaries of the real and the fantastical" (ibid: 7). As such genre fiction can be political, challenging authority in all forms, often laying bare the intricacies of politics to be

unraveled by the analytic mind who might delve into both the form and the content to understand its workings. In fact genre fiction politicizes that which is taken for granted, “bringing the questionable ...into a space where it can be questioned for relevance and critiqued for social, ethical, and moral values” (ibid: 7). The popularity of genre fictions may serve as an indicator of its capacity to influence a wide range of readers, who might either be provoked towards dismantling the status quo by the unpacking of its intricate politics, or may be risen to revolutionise through disillusionment, or even be created as a competent site for disseminating new understandings of concepts like nation or agency. The complexities embedded within Indian genre fiction may be comprehended and analysed by mapping the overlaps between genre fiction written in English and *bhasha* literature. Chattopadhyay et al. categorically point out its significance:

The study of Indian genre fiction across different languages and genres reveals a vibrant site where one may locate multiple contestations of politics, including identity politics, revealing patterns unavailable to someone who consumes literature in English alone, or in only...*bhasha* literatures (ibid: 8).

This vibrant site of analysis could in turn reveal how despite thematic continuities there are also significant divergences which may be swayed by patterns of distribution and consumption which is varied across languages, genres and regions. Moreover it may also allow the understanding of how similar tropes across genres and languages might be able to show how “genre labels come into existence for marketing purposes, allowing people to work with new containers, finding new things to see, to classify, and to say” (ibid: 8).

Thus what such notions make apparent is the need to look into the incredibly expanding genres like mythological fictions (especially the Indian English corpus), crime fictions (in both regional and Indian English). It is also important to analyse the biases involved in the institutionalization of various genre fictions like detective fictions which have become part of many syllabi, although only through canonical texts. Surveying the extent to which detective fictions have registered their presence in either regional languages, or through translations, or being written originally in English, would enable the unlocking of one’s understanding of how market and publishing strategies intersect with the changing readership concerns, whereby tropes,

presentation, dissemination might consequently be affected by the readership which is targeted and hence inform the power politics involved in the reception and engagement with the vibrant genre of detective fictions.

### 1.2.2. **The publishing circuit: what sells and how?**

Detective fiction as a genre has been continuously subjected to modification, despite its recognizable European and American influence. These modifications have been accomplished through the efforts of authors who have tried to anchor the genre locally, as may be seen in the works of Bengali detective fiction writers like, Panchkari De, whose detective figure, Gobindaram, emerged out of his translations of Sherlock Holmes stories, only to take a life of his own. Local authors have, therefore, continuously tried to improvise upon the given structures of the genre by localizing the settings, the actions, thereby, creating within the genre a veritable social, cultural and political landscape. This certainly renders the genre a transgeneric and trans disciplinary character which could attract attention from a variety of readership, while being consistently shaped by the “simultaneous processes of homo- and heterogenization in the course of its circulation and local adaptation” (Meyer 6). It, therefore, becomes imperative to fathom the notion of the market strategies involved in the publication and distribution of detective fictions in and from the subcontinent to understand how such localization processes of the genre is influenced by and in turn influences the reception of the genre within a certain political, social, cultural and critical locale.

Despite discussions about the increasing global circulation of literatures produced by the writers of the region of South Asia, that which ultimately circulates beyond the region remains rather limited (Meyer 10). The power imbalances that inform these circulation processes of literatures often tend to create an idea about the viability of a certain genre and the response towards it. Emma Dawson Varughese, Meyer points out, underlines the fact that since the very act of literary production, especially in case of genre fictions, is mostly dominated by a broader variety of topics and genres which tend to address local issues, with a majority of works being written by local authors for a local readership, it might not always cater to the taste and expectation of an international audience (qtd. in Meyer 9). As such, when a production does not fit into the frame of what is understood as typically Indian, it finds no

international resonance, and is, thereby, shoved aside even within the local. Again, for a genre like detective fiction, which is considered to be so embedded within the imported structures of the genre, that deviations in pseudonorm<sup>xvi</sup> often tend to become unacceptable, or in the least frustrating, so much so that it fails to arouse any interest beyond its prescriptive understanding which tends to become its natural character. Hence if we have a look into the power imbalances in the circulation and dissemination of certain genres, especially genre fictions, we might go on to notice that instead of becoming a fertile ground for experimentation, as is expected from an inconclusive genre like crime or detective fiction, the genre ends up producing clichés, in accordance to the market demands, thus becoming critically unnoticeable.

According to Varughese<sup>xvii</sup>, therefore, to expunge Indian genre fictions, like detective fictions, from the ideas of Western prototypes would be significant in order to understand how the genre is taking shape domestically (142), which might in turn allow a comprehension of the scenario within the context of South Asian literatures. Varughese explains that writing, reading, publication activities in India have already proven that “India is no longer substantially beholden to the Western academy for publishing opportunity, endorsement, or canon formation” (142). Since “plenty is happening at home” (ibid: 142), it becomes important to understand what happens to Indian commercial fiction, to use Suman Gupta’s term, as it is consumed within India, displaying a kind of Indianness. In this respect, if the distinction between literary and commercial genre is evoked, it might be useful to turn to Gupta again. Gupta contends that, although these two terms- literary and commercial- are constituted in opposition to each other, “both are plausibly understood as market-led categories” (46). Gupta further argues, that while literary fictions comprise of what is usually considered as ‘Literature’ by an academic elite, genre fiction also develops out of that rationale (ibid: 46). However, no texts can exist without layers of meanings; as such whether a genre is literary or popular can actually be ascertained through the meaning making processes involved.

Production and circulation mechanisms have always been instrumental in the way a particular genre is viewed. Aakriti Mandhwani<sup>xviii</sup> in her discussion of the Hindi crime fiction writer, Surender Mohan Pathak, analyses the interesting transition that takes place in the consumption of his novels when the production patterns change to

transform the ‘pulp’ character of these novels to adorn a literary garb. This transition suits the demands of new readers, whom she calls, the ‘alternative middlebrow’, who not only have the money to spare, but also want to present themselves as the new elite reading class, and associate themselves with reading materials which can be instrumental in rearticulating their idea of taste and distinctiveness (189-199). Thus market forces and instruments of the publishing industry might also impact a genre’s emergence depending on paratextual elements, like titles, subtitles, cover designs, which also functions as the signifier of a specific genre, argues Hoffman (qtd. in Meyer 51). These processes might also influence a sort of homogenization and standardization of certain genres, whose market acceptability might become a hindrance in the creation of complex plot structures, or also to incorporate deviation from the standard. But again as Sapiro points out, the readers’ ‘expectation of innovation’ might not make standardization a long term strategy for the publishers (qtd. in Meyer 52). Thus, literary and commercial, therefore, seem to become quite ambiguous market constructs. Suman Gupta points at a “competition for control between different aspects of the literary establishment” (220) which tend to emerge as the determining factor for categorizing the genres as different and often, opposing to each other.

Meyer draws on Bourdieu’s two pole literary field to understand how the publishing market sets up the marker for the distinction between literary and popular. Meyer states that, in *The Rules of Art* (1995), Bourdieu has considered the literary field as a field which has “gained autonomy from state control over time and which exists in relative (in)dependence from the economic and political field in a larger field of power” (qtd. in Meyer 52). Thus, while the authors focussing on avant-gardist production, set outside the restrictions of market, are situated at the autonomous pole which steers clear of commercial success and focuses on long term accumulation of symbolic capital, but which might become eventually connected to economic profit, the heteronomous pole or subfield of large scale production is oriented towards mass-market production that focuses on short term economic profit (ibid: 53). Authors at the latter pole are suspiciously considered because they tend to meet the demands raised by the market, which is considered to bring about a compromise in the literary quality. Bourdieu points out that, as an enterprise moves towards the commercial pole, the products it offers to the market, either directly or completely, responds to a ‘pre-existing demand, and pre-established forms’ (ibid: 54). This notion of production has



an affinity with genre fiction where writers are considered to be motivated by market-induced formulae of meeting demands, drawing on pre-existing demands and pre-existing forms, whereas the demands of the literary field are often considered to be outside such demands. A close scrutiny would, however, forge the understanding that such distinctions are not without overlaps, as in this case, it is both influenced by a pre-existing demand based on the class of readerships they cater to. Again such distinctions become ambiguous when, say, genre fiction, which is considered to be low brow fiction, is seen to be hugely consumed by middle and upper class urbane intellectuals, while also being engaged by writers from the autonomous poles like Satyajit Ray, Umberto Eco, Jorge Luis Borges, among others. Yet the seriousness with which a literary fiction is consumed seems to have a teleos, mostly academic critical engagement, whereas the popular genre is considered to be read as a diversion, for pleasure, as if the element of pleasure is alien to literary genres. Again, the continuing eagerness in consumption of classic crime narratives, like Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot series, Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series, Saradindu Bandhopadhyaya's Byomkesh Bakshi series, or Satyajit Ray's Feluda series cannot find attestation to the assumption of short production cycles of the commercial pole.

Moreover, Scott McCrackenwhile discussing market strategies of production claims that, popular fiction "has always provided structures within which our lives can be understood due to its capacity to closely react to extra textual changes and to address particular anxieties" (qtd. in Meyer 60). While mirroring such values and concerns, the authors might "select, dramatise and use a multiple of other literary devices with an awareness of the market and readership they are catering for" (Meyer 59). One such literary device often used in genre fictions, like detective fictions, is that of being produced as a serial which is often connected to the viability of a character in multiple ways. While such a device instigates the consumer to continuously consume a particular series, which becomes profit generating, it also allows readers to get repeated insights into the character, the settings, nuances, which might allow tracing a graph with respect to the character's development. This serialization also provides a wide canvas to the writers of detective fictions who might be able to collate various tropes and ingredients which can, in turn, comment on the socio-political scenario in which it is set, therefore disseminating ideas far beyond a privileged set of readers.

Detective fiction, as such, may be used to challenge the one-sided distribution of literature which often evolves from the centre of production in the West. By continuously diverting from what is designated as the core of the genre (English and American fictions), it challenges the very idea of a core. The core is considered to possess a defining factor for the genre, which tends to be taken in as a standard. However, when such a pseudonorm reaches the peripheral areas, it is transmuted to suit a local readership as may well be exemplified by the way iconic European detective fictions came to India, were read, translated, transmuted to form its own category. This transmutation is generated by the market to which it must cater, thus making the local an innate character of the genre. However, this might not always translate itself to create a global circulation, since the politics of global circulation system often decides what gets circulated from where and where to. Hence, following Meyer, one may infer that the circulation of Indian crime fiction can hardly be called an “intercourse in every direction” (62) as authors from South Asia dealing with genre fiction are still disadvantaged in the global market which is dominated by standards pre-set by the Western markets. While successful writers from the West are available here, and inspire local writers, the opposite is hardly true. Academic engagements with Indian detective fictions have also been restricted to a few canonical authors who have been published and translated into English. It is important to realise that when institutions are incorporating best-sellers into their syllabi, they are also responding to a marker of readable literature as indicated by the market. Similarly when academic programmes widen their scope to incorporate creative writing courses, it is well realised that what one is dealing with here are different characters of literature, and not a value system.

### 1.2.3. Redefining South Asian literatures

The category, ‘South Asia’, is envisaged mainly through the lens of ‘area studies’ which made an upsurge in North America following the intellectual drive during the Cold War era. The institutionalisation of the idea of ‘South Asia’ seemed to have more of a strategic impetus inspired by American foreign policies than mere academic objectives (Alam<sup>xix</sup> 15). Nalini Natarajan<sup>xx</sup> argues, with respect to the Western purview of South Asian area studies, that a mystified understanding of the region came to be propagated where heterogeneity of cultural forms was accepted, but not adequately interrogated or engaged with. This contributed to conferring the region

with a sense of uniqueness, while simultaneously placing the region within universalist or transculturalist paradigm of uniqueness (Natarajan 591). A consortium of three factors- demographic, individual and systematic- which went on to influence the methodological understanding of the studies, Natarajan evaluates, created a systemic understanding of South Asia. This went on to influence and was influenced by the intention of spreading knowledge about the orient in the west where structures of knowledge production was governed by interests of a few<sup>xxi</sup> who determined the direction of the field as a whole (ibid: 593). The over-arching structural principle that was created made it debatable whether such studies ever disturbed the static views of South Asia as different, but an unchanging case (ibid: 594).

A strain of similar doubt lingers in Fakrul Alam when he tries to evaluate the idea of South Asian literature. He muses- is the body of South Asian literature “a construct of critics working in a niche of English departments in North America and Europe, where expatriates used the category to cement their scholarly concerns in western academia?” (44). He seems to point towards the possibility of a deliberate conniving of the category of South Asian literature to benefit the aspiration of scholars, critics and writers alike, who consider South Asia as a stepping stone to purchase western acceptance, almost advocating a form of Orientalism from within. Alam enumerates certain themes which have a significant amount of western purchase and are inevitably treated as ‘South Asian’: “colonial encounters, the advent of nationalism, the consequences of partition, and nation-building in the nascent decolonised state”, endemic poverty, religious, class and caste prejudices, patriarchal injustices, plight of marginalised and steadily disappearing communities, alienation induced by immigration, trauma of uprootedness, and diasporic consciousness (ibid: 43). This assemblage of themes marked as ‘South Asian’ tends to promote certain genres alone as representative of the signifier. This idea seems to be based on the process of exclusion, on reducing of possibility of conversation or encounters between disciplines and genres. Such formulation seems to inevitably mute genres that might not adhere to the norms of those imbibed within the signifier ‘South Asian’, posing them as the inevitable ‘other’, or as mere divergence in the universalist frame of South Asian literature.

As English becomes the language that spontaneously occupies public life in the region, it has also become the language that is increasingly used creatively by writers to respond to themes which are deemed as 'distinctly South Asian' (ibid: 43). However, Alam realises, that when a region is home to cultures and languages that are diverse, to transfix oneself with the proliferation of writings in English and for the English speaking world alone, might be about missing the whole point of South Asian literatures. Hence while Rushdie unapologetically and firmly claims in *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997* that "...Indo-Anglian literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books" (x), one may find oneself in shock to discover with Ben Baer<sup>xxii</sup> that in the *Indian National Bibliography* for 2012, there are 800 entries under English fiction publication in comparison with the 7800 publications under other Indian languages (66). This makes it quite clear that what is constructed as South Asian literature is an object of knowledge that is dished out for soothing the appetite of the West, although what happens at the ground unfolds a different reality.

It, therefore, becomes important to realise that while understandings of socio-cultural and political paradigms cannot be bracketed by representative literatures and literary traditions, a defatiguing of understanding with respect to 'formulaic' genres of the region needs to be brought out from the continuous dominance and exoticisation of such genres under the Western universalist terms. Such an urge might foster, according to Ashish Nandy, to look forward to a South Asian scholarship not blinkered by the western discourse of nationalism but one where its practitioners "rediscover that South Asian societies are woven not around the state, but around their plural cultures and pluri-cultural identities" (qtd. in Alam 46). This would go on to create an idea of South Asia with a sense of spilling over conditions to raise the notion of pluri-cultural identities. Moreover this could lead to create literatures that respond to the pressures of life and to the changing cultural conditions, looking for which one must go beyond the particular languages and themes, may be even genres. Adopting a broader South Asian perspective we may emphasize with Baer that, there is a need to open up for transaction between languages of the subcontinent and in studying their literary transaction with each other and with the other languages of the world while also trying to understand what is happening between sites, works, writers and readers that are not in the circuits where global literary success is measured and decided (67).

The platform provided by such arguments might allow forwarding the case for detective fictions from India to be considered as constitutive of the category of South Asian literatures because the map laid down by the consumption and production patterns of detective fictions in India, in both regional languages and in Indian English, along with the experimentation that the genre has undergone over a century now, calls for attention to the intricacies which lay beyond the preconceived notion of its surface simplification as a formulaic genre. Priya Joshi<sup>xxiii</sup> in her desire to unravel “how literate Indians addressed, absorbed, consumed, and otherwise responded to the world of textuality and print that originated in and arrived from Britain” (xvii), had discovered that under the impact of popular British novels by Reynolds, Crawford, Corelli and sensational novels by Wilkie Collins, there had been ‘narrative indigenisation’ which definitely went on to influence novel writing in India as a whole. Drawing a clue from this, it may be inferred that a genre like detective fiction which displays unmissable marks of the process of indigenisation and transmutation for over a century now, can be a definite register of social, cultural and political transitions besides being influenced by and influencing literary dimensions of fiction writing. As the genre has sustained local needs for many years now, to consider it only under the shadow of a west impressed pseudonorm, and hence unsuitable within the South Asian paradigm might lead us to have a constricted understanding of South Asian readership and production. Such a constricted understanding might lead one to remain oblivious of the practices of cultural translation, the bricolage that had developed from the consumption of western fictions within India, and also the dialectic between the indigenous form and the European form of the genre, which definitely can open up dimensions to understand how the novel form in India grew out of a rewarding transaction between the domestic and the imported narrative traditions. It may be found, how by eschewing the pseudonorm, detective fictions in India have admixed imagination with the intricacies of everyday experiences, which are mostly local, and sometimes, thoroughly imbricated within Indian understandings which could generate the need for reviving pluri-cultural societies as the genre finds itself looking into the various factions of Indian society, culture and politics. That the genre should remain outside academic interests of and, mostly, in the perspective of South Asian literatures seems to steer towards a complacency that the western universalist framework provokes South Asian literatures to be, unique, plural but only traversing the road that is often taken.

In his way to shape the idea of South Asian studies, Pepinsky<sup>xxiv</sup> sets out a plea: “that we embrace the tensions *within* disciplines, *between* discipline and area, and across disciplines *in* the area” (216). This plea points at the need to do away with the propensity for coherence within disciplines, and promoting interaction among and within disciplines, so that what evolves is not a homogenous understanding of disciplines. It is only when varied perspectives from within the disciplines are brought into conversation with each other, that those engaged in knowledge production can consider the field as not static, but an emergent phenomenon. It may be inferred, therefore, that a literary genre, if considered only by itself, might end up being cloistered within dimensions that fall silent with time and project a similarly insulated understanding that makes the genre static. Its only when a literary genre is understood by opening it up for interactions with other disciplines, can it lead to the emancipated and unbordered understanding of South Asian literatures. This would also provide an enhanced agency to the category of South Asian literature, by removing its brackets and promoting inter disciplinarity as a method of doing South Asian literary studies. According to Natarajan, such constraints may be consequently interrogated by feminist readings (9) which might also go on to illustrate the changefulness within South Asian societies where multiple subjectivities must stand acknowledged, doing away with the noisier discourses that tend to downplay such multiplicity in order to project brand ‘South Asia’. A conversation among disciplines and generic tropes as may be compulsively noticed in genre fictions, like detective fictions, might, therefore, become instrumental in expanding and consolidating the scope of South Asian literature. By moving out of the western core, the genre of detective fictions localizes within the language and setting in which it is placed. Besides, it provides a ready platform for the intermixing of generic tropes, where its deal with a wide range of issues that emerge from the societal, historical, cultural and political complexities of the region, within its literary frame. Its flexibility, thus, renders disciplinary boundaries shadowy while explicating its subject matter, thus promoting the necessity of an interdisciplinary understanding of its workings, which not only account for its persistent mass appeal but also makes it an important vehicle for putting the idea South Asian literatures in perspective.

An overlapping of these concerns informs the viability of engaging with the present research which intends to dismantle the constructs of literary and popular

literature by revealing the intricacies that the genre deals with within what is preconceived as a formulaic structure. It is by delving into the socio-cultural and political ideologies which inform the genre that the research tends to understand changing dimensions of the genre over time, especially with respect to the canon of Indian women writing women detectives, thus intending to use inter disciplinary as a method. Needless to say, the canon of Indian women writing detective fictions seems to be most obscured, especially locally where the woman detective is still a misnomer. Its global appeal seems to rest on its being able to fulfill the western agenda of knowing the orient woman. However, it is nowhere within the radar of South Asian studies despite its constant negotiations with the varied dimensions of a pluri-cultural society which unravels the presence of multiple identities that seem to defy any coherence of bordered understandings. A survey of the recent literatures produced on detective fictions in India might be able to further consolidate the need for such a venture.

### 1.3. Literature Review

Chandler's relief in crime genres escaping the 'dead hands of academia' can no longer find attestation when one witnesses the enormous amount of literatures being produced on the genre of crime fiction in Western academia. Well acclaimed academic brands like Cambridge, Palgrave, Routledge, Wiley- Blackwell, to say the least, have attached themselves to the study of crime and detective fictions. Coteries of scholars have emerged as pioneers<sup>xxv</sup> in the study of the history of the genre, its nuances with respect to philosophy, feminist and gender studies, race, ideologies, social and cultural criticism. This has made the genre of crime fiction a vibrant field of study where new studies continue to emerge in the form of journal articles, enriching the genre and also opening it up for future investigations. However, these criticisms focus on the western corpus of crime fictions, especially those emerging out of the English and the American heteronormative corpus, as the norm. With respect these fictions, the fictions emerging from the regions outside the core, are thought of as either off-shoots, merely branching out, or deviations from the standard. While influences of the English and American canon of the genre cannot be denied, to consider these as the standard without taking into account the socio-political conditions which might have influenced the dissemination of these fictions, might lead to a prejudiced opinion emerging out of the practice of comparison. Hence while these critical works are undeniably important

contributions to the field, which have been read with enough thoroughness for the present research, these works might not always be enough to comprehend the nuances of the Indian corpus which this research tries to deal with. Hence instead of attempting a review of these critical works, which might tend to become repetitive, this section tries to zoom into the scenario of Indian criticism of crime/detective fictions to thereby locate the departure points and the effectiveness of the present study.

Pooja Sinha<sup>xxvi</sup> observes, "...[to] understand the contemporary book market in India [...]it is necessary to pay close attention to the book reviews, newspaper articles, interviews and readers' blogs" (qtd in Meyer 97). This statement is not far from truth when one tries to rummage through the literatures on crime fiction and detective fictions in India. While newspapers and magazines are replete with information regarding recent development in the Indian corpus of the genre, there are blogs<sup>xxvii</sup> which also put together information, even analysis, on the history and the present developments of detective fictions coming out of India, especially Indian English and in some cases Hindi and Bengali fictions. These platforms are constantly used to publicise the Indian fictions usually by drawing corollary to the Western prototypes. For such comparisons either the established figures of Sherlock Homes, Miss Marple, or the Bostwanian, Precious Ramotswe, among others, are evoked, or a new coterie of, mostly Scandinavian characters, like Kurt Wallander, Lisbeth Salander, and the like are considered as standards. While women writers of detective fictions in India become 'desi Agatha Christies'<sup>xxviii</sup>, Swaminathan's detective in her sixties, Lalli, must draw up comparisons with Mrs. Marple. This consolidates the fact that not only are these detectives famous worldwide because of the globalised publication circuits which are dominated by the west, but local imagination is also thoroughly influenced by these figures which reach the readers through the wide circulation of these publishing circuits. Newspapers continuously review the translation of detective stories into films, which has been an emerging trend in the recent years. Since such transitions are made keeping the target audience in mind, auteurial discretion in the portrayal of the characters sometimes remain completely oblivious to the politics behind the originary idea of the portrayal of the character. Directed by Arindam Sil, the film *Mitin Maashi*(2019), based on Suchitra Bhattacharya's woman detective, *Mitin maashi*, presents Mitin as a woman who is childless and craves for a child. The original fictional creation presents Mitin as homely character who is a wife, a mother and also a



detective, a woman who strides across roles with ease. Suchitra intended to dispel the prejudice against married women with careers as demanding as those of a detective. However, the film does away with the complexity by making Mitin childless or, if one may, child-free.

However, the news media and blogs which are accessible online serve as platforms to showcase the newer trends in the reception of detective fictions, discussing about changes being brought about in the mannerisms in which the characters are dealt with, the newness incorporated through gender, besides serving as journalistic registers of the detective characters as and when these appear across mediums. Many of these articles often incorporate author's interviews, along with authorial biographies and a glimpse into their literary careers, which often serve as entry point into these fictions which are useful for initiating critical studies into the field, although they might not be critical in themselves. Many of such articles are referred to the consequent discussions in the chapters.

Academic research of the genre of crime and detective fictions in India is sparse. There are a few works which, while considering the publishing circuit of genre fiction in the subcontinent, or in South Asia, also deal with the genre of crime or detective fiction which form one of the motifs of genre fiction. *Indian Genre Fictions: Past and Future Histories* (2019), edited by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Aakriti Mandwani and Anwasha Maity, incorporates useful discussions on the idea of 'genre fiction' in India, which is essential to situate the understandings of the workings of detective fictions as genre fictions, and also on Hindi pulp fictions, popular fictions in late colonial Tamil Nadu, Urdu writers of *mistriz* among others. Pooja Sinha's doctoral work, *Contemporary Indian English Genre Fiction: Conventions and Contexts in the Marketplace* (2013), is a work that focuses on the market strategies that influence the publication and dissemination of crime fictions within and from India, and provides perceptive discussions on the genre. Contemporary discussions on the genre can further be traced in the recent articles of Emma Dawson Varughese, besides her monograph, *Reading New India: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction in English* (2013). Works like Krishna Sen and Rituparna Roy's *Writing India Anew: Indian-English Fiction 2000–2010* (2013) or Om Prakash Dwivedi and Lisa Lau's *Indian Writing in English and the Global Literary Market* (2014) deal with the position and changes in Indian literature

and the global field, thus providing with initial points of probing into the genre. Priya Joshi in *In Another Country* (2002) points out that when the Indian novel emerged, it did so in forms that successfully subverted earlier colonial policies and radically reversed the priorities of Englishness and empire within the once foreign form of the novel; Indian detective novels definitely work up to this.

Probing into the limited continent of critical works on crime fiction which deals with the divergences from the British and American corpus of the genre, might make us stumble upon Maureen Reddy's work, *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading race in Crime Fiction* (2003), which evaluates how the various tropes of detective genre has been modified and revised by both writers of colour and white feminist writers, thereby, making attempts to serve as transformative ends, notwithstanding the relevant and serious limits to racial reconfigurations in crime fictions. However, her analysis does not engage with the contributions made by South Asian writers of detective fiction, which may be due to the fact that such writings in English are quite recent and the major contribution of the genre, at least in India, has been made by vernaculars. Critical works on the genre of crime fictions are also sparse. Prabhat K. Singh deals with new crime fiction novels in his introduction to *The Indian Novel in English of the New Millennium* (2013) where he mostly talks of male writers of male detective fictions. Neele Meyer's *Glocalizing Genre Fiction in the Global South: Indian and Latin American Post-Millennial Crime Fiction* (2017) is an extensive research on crime fictions from the global south (India and Latin America) focussing on the emerging trends in the publishing markets of the regions- India and Latin America- which allows her to look into the various nuances of the genre of crime fiction- the gender question, the complexities of crimes- as she zooms onto the twentieth century crime fiction from the region. Tanvi Patel in her work, *Emerging Crimewallahs: Modern Developments in South Asian Crime Fictions* (2011) investigates the changes in twentieth centuries fictions of crime being produced in South Asia, particularly India, by writers like Satyajit Ray, Ashok Banker, Aravind Adiga and Vikas Swarup.

The proliferation of the genre of detective fictions during the colonial period seems to have received some critical attention, although that too is quite thin. Francesca Orsini deals with the detective fictions in Indian languages from the era, especially Hindi and Bengali fictions in her article, "Detective Novels: A Commercial Genre in

Nineteenth- Century North India” (2004), where she provides a survey of mainly the Hindi canon of crime novels which first emerged out of translation from the Bengali novels. Critics like Damrosch (2014) and Daschel (2003) deal with the tendencies of the Urdu crime fictions of the era, which can also be found in C.M. Niam (2019). Shampa Roy’s study, *Gender and Criminality in Bangla Crime Narratives: Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (2017) engages with gender and the idea of criminality in early twentieth century crime narratives, particularly from Bengal. In this work, Roy maps the evolution of the genre of crime and detective fictions while also trying to analyse the position of gender in these early Bengali works. Arindam Dasgupta’s ‘Introduction’ to the two volumes (2017) of early narrative of detective fictions from colonial Bengal also serve the purpose of understanding the evolution of the figure, through the ideologies of the public and the print media, thus providing an extensive ground for furthering the work of research in this area. Speaking of works written in Bengali on the genre of crime fiction definitely brings to the mind the critical-catalogic study by Sukumar Sen in *Crime Kahinir Kalkranti* (1988) which can definitely be considered an important spring board for researches into the genre. Suchitra Mathur’s essay, “Holmes’s Indian Reincarnation: A study in Postcolonial Transposition” (2006) compares Conan Doyle’s Holmes to Ray’s Feluda using Bhaba’s notion of mimicry to illustrate the ways in which Ray displaces the figure of Holmes within a postcolonial context. Using a postcolonial framework, Pinaki Roy in *The Manichean Investigators: A Postcolonial and Cultural Rereading of the Sherlock Holmes and Btomkesh Bakshi Stories* (2008), compares Byomkesh Bakshi, created by Saradindhu Bandhipadhyia around 1930s, and Sherlock Holmes, Conan Doyle’s cult detective figure created around 1880s, drawing upon the deviations that became instrumental in the creation of the Indian figure of the detective, which also became a cult figure, besides Satyajit Ray’s Feluda. An investigation into the genre undertaken by Gautam Chakravarti in “The *Bhadralok* as Truth-Seeker: Towards a Social History of the Bengali Detective”(2012) focuses on the emerging idea of the middle class *bhadralok* as could be witnessed in the character of Byomkesh Bakshi. Ed Christian in his analysis of ‘post-colonial detectives’ in *The Postcolonial Detective* (2001) points out that the detectives always belong to a certain culture which invariably affects their ability to work, mostly being marginalized and unable to use their full potential and their creators’ interest lies in an exploration of how these detectives’ approach to

might also help in diverting the focus of research away from the Western canon, trying to locate the individualistic aspects of the Indian corpus.

None of these works are trying to examine how the women writer and her woman detective came into being following the socio-cultural and political understandings imbricated in the evolution of the genre. It is only through such an investigation that the evolution of women's agency and women subjectivity, as it might transpire, can be determined. Generic themes like deviation of what has been understood as a norm, or what is told about the women in modern India as a whole seem to be matters of significant engagement. Although women detectives were created in order to break down the gendered dominance of the male detective characters, to study them in comparison to the male detectives might lead to eclipsing of a number of issues, if male figures are considered to be the standard. Hence it becomes important to independently study the idea of the women detectives as created by the women writers so that one can trace the changing dimensions of the evolving subjectivity of the woman detective.

While violence is one of the major concerns of women's studies in India, violence is also intricately associated with detective fictions. When the detective is a woman, negotiations with violence is likely to be distinct from that of a male detective. However, little can be found in the critical works which engage with the idea of violence, especially the changing forms of violence against any marginalised section of society of which these fictions by women writers so significantly deal with. Such an examination might be able to reveal intricacies of characterisation which will further find expression in the subjectivities which are to be analysed. The subjectivities of the women detectives is also intricately bound to the idea of nation, family and work, which again has bound less critical space in existing literature.

### 1.5. Research Questions

The following, therefore, evolve as the research questions that would ascertain the path that the research takes up:

- What concerns shaped the idea of the detective at its inception during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the genre found a prolific market, especially in Bengal, which went on to impact the Indian literary scene?

criminal investigation are influenced by their cultural attitudes. As such while the detectives are bound to the socio-cultural milieu where they are situated, the situations which they must deal with also evolves out of the settings where they operate, thus allowing an interrogation of the dynamics that create these settings.

#### 1.4. Research Gap

Although a genre like detective fiction cannot have exhausted its critical limits, most of the works on the Indian corpus of the genre seem to engage with the canonical male figures like Byomkesh Bakshi or Feluda or, very recently, Arjun Arora or detective works by Ashok K. Banker. Critical engagement with women writers and their women detectives is almost negligible. This seems to attract attention because women writers and their detective figures have been quite popular among both regional and Indian English readers; but they seem to garner no attention from critical perspective. While Meyer's work dwells on some of the Indian women authors of detective fictions, it focuses more on publication and circulation strategies that these fictions seem to address to and is not concerned in evaluating the changing dimension of women subjectivities as might evolve from a concentrated study of the genre. Again, while such engagements seem natural given the recent emergence of the canon of Indian English detective fictions, to shove the detective narratives in Indian languages, might subdue the vibrancy that has been woven into the genre since its inception. It is in the regional languages that one might be able to trace the evolutionary moment of the genre in India, which, through continuous refurbishing, has resulted in the transmutation of the genre as it can be found today. Hence it becomes important to bring this new corpus of detective fictions into conversation with the existing corpus of detective genre in *bhasha* literature in order to trace the trends and tendencies of the genre of detective fictions within the country, especially with regards to women's writing detective fictions. Of course, the limitations of incorporating diversity by engaging regional literatures cannot be denied; but at least a beginning of conversation can be suggested. Moreover, the Bengali corpus of detective fictions (which the research intends to deal with) is an important trailblazer in the corpus of detective fictions in India; hence such an engagement as the present research might be able to draw a penetrating outline of the historical impulses of the genre. Such an engagement

- With reference to the concerns mentioned in point (i), how did the woman writer, whose evolution has been intricately shaped by the changing socio-political scenario of the country, especially by the concerns raised by the women's movements at particular points in history, negotiate with the idea of the woman detective in Indian women's detective fictions?
- How did the changing idea of violence in an Indian context, coupled with the notion of violence as embedded within the structure of detective genre, influence the subjectivity of the woman detective?
- How did the subjectivity of the woman detective negotiate with the ideas of nation, family and work which are also intricate constituents of the creation of a woman detective?
- How do such discussions contribute to understanding the gendered politics in the genre and the scope that lies therein to comprehend and complicate Indian middle class urban woman subjectivity?

#### 1.6. Research Statement

The research intends to investigate the Indian corpus of women detective fictions written by Indian women writers to comprehend the evolution of women subjectivities by evaluating contingent moments of emancipation as the woman detective negotiates with the categories of nation, family, work and violence by contesting and complying with these gendered categories as these continue to pervade Indian women's subjective positions.

#### 1.7. Rationale of the Research

The choice of incorporating writers from two different languages, Bengali and Indian English, emanates from the intent to locate multiple contestations of politics and patterns that might have been used to etch the characteristics of the woman detective across cultures and settings within the Indian polity. From Bengali literature, the research would focus on two eminent writers of domestic fictions, who were also famous for creating women detective characters embedded within the times in which they were created. Since they were both writers of domestic fictions, it would be of particular interest for the research to evaluate how they negotiated with their perspectives of domesticity while creating the woman detective. From Bengali, the research chooses to deal with - Prabhavati Debi Saraswati, and her detective character-

Krishna- created in around 1950s; the stories were serialized in *Praheleeka* and *Kanchenjunga* series published by Deb Sahitya Kutir<sup>xxix</sup>; Suchitra Bhattacharya created the middle-class, home maker, woman detective, Pragyaparamita Mukherjee, popular as Mitin *maashi*; these stories mostly appeared in *Anandamela* magazine from around 2002<sup>xxx</sup>; the installments continued until Bhattacharya's death in 2015. Both the writers, Prabhabati and Suchitra, are acclaimed writers of Bengali novels who not only enjoyed immense popularity, but were also recipients of numerous recognitions for their contribution to literature. As women working in the public domain-the former, a teacher of a girls' school, the latter, a civil servant- both seemed influenced by their experiences, which they brought to their work as writers, and subsequently, in the characters of their women detectives. As powerful feminist voices, both the writers were observant of the changes taking place in the various dimension of a Bengali woman's life in the urban milieu of Calcutta. This definitely finds reflection in their intention to create a woman detective in the first place, almost as an intervention into an intensely gendered genre. The research, therefore, will try to probe into these characters to analyse their negotiations with the gendered categories of nation, family, work and violence in order to picture the evolution of their subject positions as these ideas are intricately linked to middle class Indian women subjectivities, among others.

The authors incorporated from contemporary Indian English corpus are writers who seem to have arrived at the genre to throw in certain aspects of experimentation with respect to characters, themes, plot structures. While dealing with the changing dimensions of what constitutes an urban women's life in the present times, these authors do not seem to be popular within the Indian critical circuits although they have been recognized with awards<sup>xxxii</sup> and translation<sup>xxxiii</sup> in the international forum. This curious position might be indicative of the prejudices pertaining to quality, gender, acceptability and the like that the genre still seems to function under in the Indian reading circuits while dealing with mature content. The present research would concentrate mainly on three women writers and their women detectives-Kishwar Desai and her series detective, Simraan Singh, who first appeared in 2010, Kalpana Swaminathan and her series detective, Lalli, who first appeared in 1997, and Madhumita Bhattacharya and her series detective, Reema Ray, who first appeared in 2016. While being prolific writers, all of these authors have engagements beyond writing and write in other genres of literature as well.

Of the three detectives series, the Lalli series is the oldest. Lalli is conceived as a retired policewoman, formerly working with the detective department at Mumbai Police. She first appeared in a book of short stories, *Cryptic Death and Other Stories* in 1997. The next installment of the series appeared ten years later as a novel, *The Page 3 Murders* (2006). In 2018 came out a book of short stories, *Murder in Seven Acts*, where once again Lalli is found walking through “a maze of family politics, right-wing lunacy, high fashion and more with her customary sangfroid” (R. Krithika *The Hindu*), thus making Lalli an interesting character with contemporary social, political and cultural allegiances. Besides, Lalli’s presentation as an aged woman of sixty years with an insight into life gathered from experiences, the connections that tend to spill across stories through the serial appearances of a few characters, and also through unsolved mysteries tend to provide ample space to study the texts for the purpose of the research. Simraan Singh is Kishwar Desai’s forty-something NGO-*wali*, an upper class woman living in Delhi, and hailing from the provincial town of Jullundhur. She is a curious amalgamation of defiance and compliance, often out rightly defying the societal norms, but again complying with actions that tend to upset the traditional bearings of a detective figure as a person who must herself remain untainted while dealing with the murky and the defiled. Creating avenues to reread the character of the detective, especially the woman detective, this character with all her instability becomes a significant choice for analysis in the research. Reema Ray is Madhumita Bhattacharya’s thirtyish detective character who is, in fact, training herself to be a detective and the series traces her journey as she is incorporated into this work as a professional detective. Hence, unlike the other characters who chanced upon their work as an investigator, Reema is seen slowly traversing the ways of being a professional investigator, someone who also has acquired a degree in criminology from a university in the US. Reema, therefore, presents a different angle to the research, being a middle class urban woman focused and dedicated to her passion, which she realizes does not only incorporate practice, but also theoretical knowledge and training. Unlike the other detectives, Reema is also in search for love and finds herself in and out of her boss, Shayak’s, life.

Speaking of the authors- Desai, Swaminathan and Bhattacharya- it may be reflected that since they continue to write in genres other than detective fiction, their experiences as writers for different mediums definitely allow them to be aware of the



ideas that inform the creation of the figure of a detective in contemporary times. This is in fact important to note and realize because while the Bengali detectives incorporated in the analysis has been categorized as either fictions for young women, or juvenile fiction, the contemporary writers can be seen catering to a mature world through their middle-aged or even older woman detectives, along with the complexities of the issues they deal with. All the fictions chosen for research have been published from famous publication brands which makes it clear that although there may be some disparity in the appeal of these detective figures- some have a more global appeal than others- these figures definitely fit into the agenda of change through experimentation that publication houses look out for in order to create a continuous demand for the genre. Again, although all are published by established publication houses, some have global appeal, while others cater to a more localized audience, also proving that there might be a wide gap between what is consumed locally and globally as brand India. Hence these fictions open up grounds for exploring how the characters of the woman detectives might have created contingent moments of agency and contributed to the understanding of woman subjectivity in an Indian context.

Locating the convergences and divergences across time and spaces which contribute to the emergence of the woman subjectivity may lead to traversing through the ideas that might be seen as working together to create the framework of detective fictions. One such idea which is inevitably linked to detective fictions is the idea of violence which consequently leads us to evaluate detective fictions commitment towards creating a just world order. It is with the changing forms of violence, mostly in its invisible or glamourized ways, which readily creep into our everyday practices, and seamlessly blend into our everyday lives without creating a comprehension of violence, that the research is particularly interested to engage with. While violent crimes bear the palpable signature of violence, and can be countered by laws which recognize these as violence, and hence punishable, invisible forms of violence, like violence within the love and care of the family, the gendered oppression, the violence meted out to people who remain beyond the normative arrangement of sexuality or gender, the violence of greed which might have various dimensions, among others, often lead to horrendous crimes. While the crimes may be visible and criminals may be punished, the intrinsic violence might remain unresolved or untouched. Again mediatized forms of violence tend to create a sense of undue attraction towards violence, which may be problematic.

The research intends to locate how the corpus in question deals with these changing dimensions of violence, and try to understand how the encounter of such forms of violence affects the characterization of the woman detective, while consequently showcasing the impact on the genre's obligation towards creating a just world order.

In its intention to look into the politics of gendered spaces, the research intends to further ponder over the ideas of nation, home and work as these inform the character of the woman detective. In looking into these, the analysis shall not remain constricted to how these notions apply to the detectives alone, but would also ponder over how the concept is dealt with within the narrative. For example, talking of the institution of family would be accomplished by looking into how the detective negotiates with the space personally, and also professionally where, by virtue of her work, she must converse with the different dimensions of the same frame.

The research intends to, thereby, move on to analyse the ultimate negotiation that underlies the coming together of the woman writer and the woman detective, who must both analyse their positions within the space that is created by the intersectional grid of the notions of violence, nation, family and work, which would eventually find expression in mapping the evolution of the female subjectivity. This would in turn comment on the idea of agency and would allow us to, may be, refurbish our ways of comprehending South Asian feminisms which should evolve not only through the understanding of representative cultures, that which is reflective of an understanding of a national trend, but also out of that which is popular, consumed by an unidentifiable mass, and thereby, might reflect and affect the local in ways unknown to the global.

### **1.8.Objectives**

The objectives of the research could, thus, be enumerated as:

- To analyse the ideas that instigated the creation of woman detective in Indian detective fictions by women;
- To study such ideas vis-à-vis the changing socio-political context of women's movements which impacted the condition and themes of women's writing in India and the evolution of women's subjectivity thereof;

- To evaluate how an intersectional grid formed by the changing notion of violence, the idea of nation, family and work effects the characterization of the woman detective;
- To evaluate how, then, the central figure of the woman detective in these fictions converses with the apparent positivist obligation of the genre to create a just world order.

### 1.9. Methodology of the Research

Maithreyi Krishnaraj<sup>xxxiii</sup> points out, “Methodology refers to one’s theoretical framework- how one views the problem of obtaining knowledge” (43). For the present research the problem lies in analyzing the evolving subjectivity of the woman detective in Indian women detective fictions. Since isolating gender as the only oppressor cannot present a full view of the scenario, the research intends to coalesce the category of gender (here by mainly concentrating on women) with those of the changing forms of violence, notions of nation, family, and work. Thus, employing the ideas of intersectionality, the research will try to understand how these categories contribute to identity formation, a certain view of the world by women, and also try to understand their vision for a future.

However since identity, subjectivity, personhood, and such ideas seem to become too idealistic when taken out of context and also when considered to evolve through radically positivistic graph, the research also follows a contextualist or extrinsic approach to evaluate the social, political and cultural contexts of text production as well as characterization. Locating the text within its context, and in fact, reading the text as a social text, would allow us to analyse the conditions of the emergence and existence of the woman detective, whose idea is definitely embedded in social and cultural relationships and structures which both enable and constrain her. Krishnaraj points out that it is important to take a view of “the human self that acknowledges the conditions of his or her emergence and existence, embedded in human relations and structures that both constrain and enable her/him” (ibid: 45). This would allow an analysis of a subjectivity that is situated and hence which recognize differences as well.

Women are not a homogenous category; but it is equally difficult to analyse and theorise how and what affects women from different categories, especially in a limited

dimension of a PhD research. Hence taking the clue from Krishnaraj again, where she says, “What we can best do is to take a situation/event, and analyse how women in different social situations relate to each other” (ibid: 45), the research intends to look into the subjectivity of the urban, middle class, working women, which is how these women detectives are actually drawn. While such isolation might not allow bringing about generalized comments, it might allow an understanding of differential access and view of empowerment within such a category.

#### 1.10. Briefing the Chapters and critical frameworks

Drawing upon the idea that an evaluation of the multiple dimensions involved in the creation of the category of genre fictions, the research, as already mentioned, would involve the study of women writers and their woman detectives from the Bengali and Indian English corpus, thereby, trying to locate the multiple patterns of contestation and identity politics. Since genre fiction politicises that which is taken for granted and might also serve to indicate its capacity to influence a wide range of readers, **Chapter 2**, titled “**Situating Detective Fictions in the Indian Past: Traversing the Possibilities of a Woman detective**”, begins by analysing the tendencies that led to the creation the detective in English fiction, who was compulsively male, and also how women detectives came up through popular women’s writings of the period as a resistance to this compulsive maleness. The intention is to map the ideas which travelled to the Indian corpus of detective fictions, mainly the Bengali fictions, through translation of the popular English texts and which did not. This would in turn allow an understanding of the workings of the indigenous regional traditions of detective fictions, especially with respect to Bengali detective fictions and how the character of the detective was framed therein. Following Arindam Dasgupta’s and Shampa Roy’s arguments regarding the socio-cultural and political aspects which informed the creation of the figure of the detective in Bengali fictions, the research would set out to analyse the necessity of this male construct of the detective. The chapter would analyse how the furore of nationalism engendered the women characters in these male detective fictions, and assess the possibilities of a woman detective in a society that was treading on the path of modernism catapulted by nationalistic fervour. Partha Chatterjee argues that nationalism sorted the ‘woman’s question’ in accordance with its own agenda so much so that women were intrinsically caught between the dichotomies of home-world,

spiritual-material, public-private, east-west. This idea befittingly serves to analyse why, despite changing times, an activity like detection, which would not only involve moving out into the public sphere, but also brush shoulders with violence, crime and other tabooed subjects, could not be extended to imagine a woman detective during the period. The period is also marked by its complex negotiation with the figure of the 'new woman' which is substantiated by a discussion of the character of Mohini from Panchkari De's *Mayabi* and Satyabati, from Saradindu Bandhopadhyay's *Byomkesh Bakshi* series. Again, as the phenomenon of the women writer- *lekhika*- also emerged during this period, it becomes significant to understand, following Tanika Sarkar and Geraldine Forbes, how the woman writer tried to ruffle up the complacent ideas of the period to project the changing dimension of women's life and how their intervention into the insulated mainstream literature of the period was definitely affected by a historical, cultural, social and political emergence of women subjectivities which might have eventually influenced the creation of the woman detective in Bengali fictions in the 1950s.

Emphasizing on the need to contextualise women's subjectivity as it emerges through women's writings, **Chapter 3**, titled, "**Voices made themselves Heard: How the Woman Writer thinks the Woman Detective**", delves into a socio-political understanding of women's movements in the country which shaped the intellectual atmosphere of the times and consequently found expression in the popular modes of dissemination of such ideas like films, songs, poetry, novels, theatre. It is by analysing certain forms of women's writings, mainly Bengali essays written by women during the colonial period and published by various magazines of the period, and critical feminist works that emerged after the 1980s, that the chapter intends to analyse how the woman writer might have been enthused to create the woman detective and negotiate with the workings of the dominant ideas of nation, family, work and violence as these pervade Indian women subjectivities. The analysis tends to follow the emergence of the middle class urban woman subjectivity mainly because detective fiction has mostly been an urban middle class phenomenon encompassing the writer, the detective, and the setting. The chapter would deal with the critical lens provided by Chandra Mohanty Talpade, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, Ipshita Chanda, Kavita Panjabi and Paromita Chakraborty, among others, to achieve its desired objective. The

chapter will, then, present an outline of the women writers and their women detectives that the research would engage with.

In detective fictions, gender is genre and the genre is male<sup>xxxiv</sup>. While such assumptions have been criticised as inconsistent with the genre of detective fictions, it might not be too far from truth. This research intends to interrogate the politics which works behind the making of detective fictions a male gendered genre by attempting to analyse the constituent aspects of the genre using a female lens. The following chapters intend to critically engage with an analysis of the ideas of nation, family and work, and the changing notions of violence as it affects these ideas, and consequently the commitment of the genre to creating an idea of a just world. Such a reading would in its turn allow a reading into the idea of the woman detective and the genre as a whole, especially when it has to come out of its complacency and deal with the question of gender where the gender in question is that of a woman.

Having laid down the necessity to look into women's writings in order to examine how women's writings have been constantly dealing with the ideas of change and newness, **Chapter 4**, titled, "**An unsuitable job for Indian women?: Indian women detectives negotiating gendered spaces**", analyses how the novel form has been used as a tool for Indian women writers to express the gendered negotiations of their everyday lives which is inevitably intertwined with the ideas of nation, family and with the moving out of women into the public sector, with women's work. This analysis will set the premise for examining how Indian women detectives negotiate with the gendered understanding of these spaces, and how their negotiations influence their subjectivities. The intersectional grid of nation, family, work is based on the very idea that women's subjectivities cannot be understood using only a single coordinate. Thus the very category of middle class, to which these detectives belong to, is also brought under examination as it influences the subjective position of the woman detective and how. Himani Bannerji's understanding of the processes of a 'fashioning of self', which is intricately linked to the idea of 'inventing subjects', is used to understand the subjectivity of the woman detective, thus, emerged. Bannerji suggests that neither social subjects, nor ideological and political agencies can be treated as spontaneous or found objects, nor should they be seen only as functions of discourses. Instead they must be seen as dynamic, and sometimes purposive, constellations of both

unconscious and conscious forms of cultural and ideological constructions which are connected to history, social organization, social relations and social locations of subjects. The chapter also uses the critical lenses forwarded by Nivedita Menon, Mary E. John, Meera Kosambi, Ipshita Chanda, Maitreyee Krishnaraj, among others, to explain the idea of India women subjectivity with respect to the ideas of nation, family and work.

Violence, in all its forms, pervades every discussion on rights and conditions of women in India. Indian women's movements have been instigated time and again by incidents of violence against women which has always made feminist rethink about the idea of violence. When violence has attracted attention by creating a state of exception, it has become important for feminists to point out that such a state of exception is being conferred to violence in order to consider it an event and hence, an aberration. However, violence is ubiquitous in the lives of the marginalized- women, children and those who lie outside the hetero normative boundaries of gender and sexuality- which makes violence an everyday affair, a continuum. Violence is also an intricate element of detective fiction where the detective must be able to neutralize the effects of violence in order to revive the credibility of a just world. Chapter 5, titled, **“Looking into the Vocabulary of Violence: Reading Indian Woman Detective Fiction”**, tries to engage with the idea of violence as an everyday reality which is present as a continuum in daily lives making the comprehension of violence absolutely impossible. As gender is in itself a violent category, the chapter looks into the gendered negotiations of violence as encountered by the women detectives in the course of their work. This analysis moves forward by categorizing violence into four interconnected groups- sexual violence, gendered violence, mediatized violence and violence for violence's sake to capture how the changing forms of violence continue to operate with familiar structures of everyday life. In the course of the analysis the chapter also tries to delve into how the women detective, then, negotiates with the idea of a just world that seems imperative to the framework of detective fiction. In this respect the chapter uses the critical lens provided on the everydayness of violence by Yusuf Has, Srila Roy, Slavoj Zizek, the analysis of sexual and gendered violence by Mary E. John, Nivedita Menon, Kalpana Kannabiran, state violence by Prathama Banerjee, and violence as pleasure by Anup Dhar.

The last chapter of the research, **Chapter 6**, titled, “**Conclusion: Gendering the Genre where the Gender is Women**” tries to bring together all the strands of the discussion by firstly, a brief looking back into the content of every chapter, secondly, by putting down the findings, and thirdly, by laying down ideas future research.

## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup>The elusivity of the term ‘crime fiction’ to denote the workings of a genre as such has been pondered upon by critics (Scaggs 2005 ;Knight 2004 ; Rzepka 2010) which has often led them to point at the slipperiness of simple categorization that the sheer diversity of the genre entails. In fact, they find the sub-genres even more problematic due to the arbitrariness, porosity and flexibility of the genre itself which defies any distinct subdivision. Hence critics have often sorted to using variations of the term to suit their purpose. Following that, this research intends to use ‘crime fiction’ to denote fictions where aspects of crime and criminality, legality etc. become central; ‘detective fiction’ to denote fictions having a firm focus on the figure of the detective; ‘crime narratives’ to denote fictions which talk of crime, not necessarily focusing on legality, or the detective figure.

<sup>ii</sup>Raymond Chandler. “Casual Notes on the Mystery Novel”. *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, edited by Dorothy Gardiner and Katherine Sorley Walker, University of California Press, 1997, p. 70.

<sup>iii</sup>Sukumar Sen. *Crime Kahinir Kalkranti*, Ananda, 1988:2012.[Translations are mine].

<sup>iv</sup>Arindam Dasgupta. ‘Introduction’. *Sekaler Goyenda Kahini: Collection of Novels*, Vol. 1 &2 edited by Arindam Dasgupta, Ananda Publishers, 2017. [Translations are mine].

<sup>v</sup> Found in oral narratives of Shaiba Community (Sen 30).

<sup>vi</sup>‘Travelling Genre’ seems to an appropriate term for detective fictions as it has been travelling to different cultures and settings, accumulating social, cultural and political idiosyncrasies on its way.

<sup>vii</sup>Markus Daechsel. “Zalim Daku and the Mystery of the Rubber Sea Monster: Urdu Detective Fiction in 1930s Punjab and the Experience of Colonial Modernity.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, vol. 13, no.1, 2003. pp. 21-43.

<sup>viii</sup> Most undergraduate syllabi of universities in West Bengal have incorporated crime and detective fictions of Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler, Arthur Conan Doyle; if Indian fictions feature, they are mostly those of Satyajit Ray, HRF Keating or other such fictions on male detectives which are either written in English or have been translated.

<sup>ix</sup>Suman Gupta, “Indian ‘Commercial’ Fiction in English, the Publishing Industry, and Youth Culture”. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 46, No. 5, 2012. pp. 46-53.

<sup>x</sup>Tabish Khair, “Indian Pulp Fiction in English: A Preliminary Overview from Dutt to De.” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol.43, no.3, 2008. pp. 59-74.

<sup>xi</sup>Neele Meyer, *Globalizing Genre Fiction in the Global South: Indian and Latin American Post-Millennial Crime Fiction*. Universitats bibliothek der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitat, 2017.

<sup>xii</sup>*Bhasha* (language from Sanskrit) is a term for indigenous languages of the Indian subcontinent, coined by GN Devy in *After Amnesia* (1992) and popularized by translation-focused publishers like Katha India.

<sup>xiii</sup>John Frow. *Genre*, Routledge, 2006.



<sup>xiv</sup>Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Aakriti Mandhwani, Anwesha Maity, editors. *Indian Genre Fictions: Past and Future Histories*. Routledge. 2019.

<sup>xv</sup>The title page of Suchitra Bahttacharya's *Mitin Mashi Samagra* (vol. 1 and 2) published by Ananda Publishers categorise it as 'Juvenile fiction'. Bhattacharya in the 'Introduction' to Vol. 1 of the collection categorically states that her intention incorporating various aspects of places, people, religion, customs is an attempt to apprise the readers about the same, so that, the young minds might be risen to curiosity. In fact her series is dedicated to young children.

<sup>xvi</sup>Pseudonorm may be considered as the core which sets out to impinge the defining character of a genre which emanates from a canon that is considered as the fountain source. For example, the British detective fictions are considered to be pseudonorm for detective genre in general.

<sup>xvii</sup>Emma Dawson Varugese. "Post-millennial 'mythology-inspired fiction' in English: the market, the genre, and the (global) reader." *Indian Genre Fictions: Past and Future Histories*, edited by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Aakriti Mandhwani, Anwesha Maity, Routledge, 2019. pp. 141-158.

<sup>xviii</sup>Aakriti Mandhwani, "From the Colloquial to the 'Literary': Hindi pulp's journey from streets to the bookshelves." *Indian Genre Fictions: Past and Future Histories*, edited by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Aakriti Mandhwani, Anwesha Maity, Routledge, 2019. pp. 189-202.

<sup>xix</sup>Fakrul Alam (2007) *Imagining South Asian Writing in English from Bangladesh*, *South Asian Review*, 28:1, 37-49, 2007. DOI: 10.1080/02759527.2007.11932501

<sup>xx</sup>Nalini Natarajan, "South Asian Area Studies in Transatlantic Dialogue" in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. Duke University Press. Vol. 27, No. 3. 2007. pp. 591-600

<sup>xxi</sup> By 'few' Natarajan points at that and those which were involved in institutionalising South Asian studies from the way it developed, the ideas as they were disseminated within the university, the leading figures as focal points, the summer schools, the scholars who moved back and forth from home institutions, the gurus of South Asian studies (ibid: 593).

<sup>xxii</sup> Ben Baer. "South Asian Literary Studies, for Better and Worse", *South Asian Review*, 38:3, 63-67, 2017. DOI: 10.1080/02759527.2017.12023348

<sup>xxiii</sup>Priya Joshi. *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture and the English Novel in India*, Columbia University Press, 1995. <https://archive.org/details/inanothercountry0000josh/page/n5/mode/2up>. Accessed on 19 Mar 2020.

<sup>xxiv</sup>Thomas B. Pepinsky, "Disciplining Southeast Asian Studies" in *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, ISEAS-YusofIshak Institute. Vol. 30, No.1. pp. 215-226. 2015.

<sup>xxv</sup> Charles Rzepka (eds. 2010); Stephen Knight (2004; 1980; 2012); Martin Priestman (eds. 2003); John Scaggs (2005); Lee Horseley (2005); Josef Hoffmann (2013); Majid Yar (2015); Megan Hoffman (2016); Sally R. Munt (2005); Heather Worthington (2005); Lucy Sussex (2010); Maureen C. Reddy (2006); Miller and Oakley (2012); Pepper and Schmid (2016).

<sup>xxvi</sup>Pooja Sinha, "Contemporary Indian English Genre Fiction: Conventions and Contexts in the Marketplace." Unpublished Thesis, Open University. 2013.

<sup>xxvii</sup><https://thegrowlery2014.wordpress.com/> ; <https://www.the curiousreader.in/features/indian-crime-writers-rising-popularity/>

<sup>xxviii</sup>Kim Arora, "Desi Agatha Christies mark their Presence", *Times of India*, 28 October 2012. Accessed on 29 July 2019.

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<sup>xxxix</sup>This year, i.e. in February, 2020, Deb Sahitya Kutir has published a volume of the collected stories of Krishna by Prabhabati Debi, edited by Ranita Chattopadhyay. However, the version of stories used in this research are taken from the original stories published in *Prahelika*, *Kanchenjunga* and *Kumarika* series from Deb Sahitya Kutir. While most of these copies were collected from Deb Sahitya Kutir itself, some copies could be found in Bangiya Sahitya Samsad, Raja Rammohun Roy Library in Kolkata.

<sup>xxx</sup>Ananda Publishers in Kolkata brought out a collection of 13 Mitin Maashi stories in a two-volume collection in 2014-2016. The references in the research are from these two volumes. Some stories were also found in digital archives. The references are given accordingly.

<sup>xxxi</sup>Desai won the Costa Book Award in 2010 for *Witness the Night* (2010) which was also long listed for the Man Asian Literary Prize. Swaminathan won the Crossword Book Award in 2009 for her book *Venus Crossing: Twelve Stories of Transit* (2009).

<sup>xxxii</sup>Kishwar Desai's *Witness The Night* has been translated into French, German, Portuguese, Spanish, Polish, Turkish, Hindi. Some of Kalpana Swaminathan's novels have been translated into Spanish, Italian and French. Overall, only individual works (usually the first novel of a series) have been translated and published abroad so far. One novel of Suchitra Bhattacharya's Mitin Mashi series, "Arakiel's Diamond" is said to have been translated into English, although I have not been able to locate a copy.

<sup>xxxiii</sup>Maitreyee Krishnaraj. "Methodological Concerns." *EPW*, vol. XLV, no. 44, 2010. pp. 43-47.

<sup>xxxiv</sup>Marty Roth. *Fair and Foul Play: Reading Genre in Classic Detective Fiction*. University of Georgia Press. 1995. pp. xiv.

## Chapter – 2

### Situating Detective Fictions in the Indian Past: Traversing the Possibilities of a Woman Detective

#### 2.1. Introduction

Origins are multifarious; trying to trace the beginnings of crime in fictions is bound to be a futile exercise since crime has always been an intricate part of narratives, both realistic and fictional. However, as Rzepka<sup>i</sup> points out, “To say that crime fiction is fiction about crime is not only tautological, it also raises a host of problems, beginning with the definitions of ‘crime’ and ‘fiction’” (1). While not all fictional narration of crime can be attributed the label of crime fiction, it is indeed difficult to ascertain what is fictitious and what is real about crime which is so subsumed into everyday life. Moreover, while categorisation of crime fiction defies any standard definition, mostly those fictions in which “the state penal code matters more than the Ten Commandments, and the threat of arrest and punishment more than the prospect of hell” (ibid:1) are pulled under the umbrella term. Again, analytical difficulties emerge when crime fictions are to be classified within standard labels like ‘golden age’, ‘hard-boiled’ or ‘tough guy’ which, according to Knight<sup>ii</sup>, are “highly emotive” (*Detection* xii) and therefore, misleading. Hence despite its much critiqued and pondered upon formulaic structure, efforts to structure the genre within a certain frame is supposed to be essentially futile as the fluid nature of the genre allows it to continuously find overlaps within and outside generic definitions. In this context, Rzepka’s discussion of John Cawelti’s three ‘archetypes’ of popular literature- adventure, romance and mystery with respect to detective fiction and its highly fluid structure- (2) may create grounds to realise that being grouped under the category of ‘popular literature’ also provides crime fiction with an open field of continuous play and experimentation. It is by virtue of these experimentations that the genre displays itself as an amalgamation of tropes which not only results in the numerous branches of the genre, but also allows the genre to participate in a conversation with other genres of literature, thus contributing to the ‘mass cultural genre system’ (Chattopadhyay et. al. 4). Although such an understanding does not quite improve upon the confusion that crime fiction as a genre sets out to create, it only allows the analysis to loosen its stringent boundaries of categories and delve into the intricacies that crime fiction weaves within its own

generic transformations. As such, detective fiction, with its overlaps with various other genres and motifs, comes to be reckoned as a slippery genre fiction, more so, because of its constant tendency of self-reflectivity and its propensity to adapt to the setting with which it converses. As such, besides its literary attributes, this genre of literature displays the influence of the socio-cultural milieu in which it is produced, thus evolving, besides other ways, as a political, social and cultural text.

Genre conventions cannot be considered fixed. The symbiotic relations between genres (Frow 3) and also within genres themselves lend to the open endedness of generic frames, thereby, contributing to the fluid structures of genres. However, it might be interesting to note here that the way a certain genre presents itself might orient the readers towards a certain way of engaging with the genre, which might tend to become recognized as the conventional character of the genre (Meyer 48). Hence any movement outside recognised fixity might become a shock for the reader who might, then, either accept or reject the mutation. But the complex relations inside and between genres do not necessarily connect to the prototype in the sense of a common 'core' (ibid: 55). Genres must combine familiarity with innovation which can account for reading pleasure, ascertain the continuity of the genre, and also further the emergence of new ones. Genres are also impacted by the market, which it intends to cater to, in stimulating the ways a genre is shaped, while also generating new demands. As such established genres turn to social-literary institutions by partly following the reader's expectations for continuity of generic conventions, and partly by creatively adapting and modifying these conventions to do justice to new contexts and challenges (ibid: 58). As such genres tend to bear imprints of the settings and situations, the collective concerns and fantasies of a particular region at a particular time, which readers can relate to in a specific context (ibid: 60). Hence while classic British detective fiction is constituted as the 'pseudonorm', the 'standard' is continuously adapted and revised in accordance to the specificities of the setting. It is this tension between the standard/norm and the continuous modification of the standard/norm that turns out to be the most interesting feature of the genre of detective fiction, which also informs its standing popularity. With its capacity to surprise, by constantly threatening the norm, detective fiction combines the familiarity of a conventional plot with newer elements or perspectives (ibid: 56), thus registering an enduring appeal of being 'popular' literature.

Chattopadhyay et. al. opine that Indian genre fictions are categorically influenced by indigenous roots and traditions which often thwart expectations, thus, making them evolve independently from their western counterpart (6). As such, instead of fostering escapism or being purely entertaining, Indian genre fiction seems to engage in a sort of dialectic of similarity or differences either between texts belonging to the same genre, or transgeneric tropes where tropes of detective fictions might align itself with those of the genre of romance, or travel, or adventure fiction (ibid: 7). This mixing up of tropes, consequently, creates the propensity to defamiliarise expectation evolving out of genres. Thus, genre fiction can readily politicize that which is taken for granted and also interrogate the questionable (ibid: 7). Chattopadhyay et. al. categorically state that it is the popularity of genre fictions which actually serves as an indicator of its capacity to influence a wide range of readers who might invest in the intricacies of its content and be proved or disillusioned enough to dismantle the status quo, or to become relevant sites for disseminating new understandings about various concepts like nation or agency (ibid: 8). Moreover, the complexities embedded within Indian genre fiction may be comprehended by mapping the overlaps between genre fictions written in English and *bhasha* literature. Chattopadhyay et al. argue:

The study of Indian genre fiction across different languages and genres reveals a vibrant site where one may locate multiple contestations of politics, including identity politics, revealing patterns unavailable to someone who consumes literature in English alone, or in only one of the *bhasha* literatures (8).

Hence, patterns of production, distribution and consumption might in turn go on to effect significant divergences in genres which might otherwise show thematic continuities with the core, so to speak. (ibid: 8). This also allows a comprehension of how similar tropes might have undergone transformation based on patterns of distribution and consumption, thus “allowing people to work with new containers, finding new things to see, to classify, and to say” (ibid: 8).

A purview of Indian detective fictions reveals it as a significant site to examine the above concerns with respect to how a genre is formed, transmitted, indigenized, and mutated based on the specific demands it intends to serve. An examination in this context tends to become more intricate when practices of the genre initiated during the colonial period in regional languages for a more local audience are juxtaposed with the

recent Indian English form which tries to converse with the global marketing strategies and scenarios. Moreover, the problem seems to find newer dimension when women, both as writers of detective fictions and as fictional detectives, enter the scene creating immense possibilities to examine how bricolage and dialectic might come together to produce subjectivities which, while being localized, would also contribute to the global understanding of the genre and the idea of the woman detective. This chapter, therefore, attempts to dwell on the beginnings of detective fictions- first, its English lineage, and then, the indigenous, regional lineage (here Bengali)-to be able to examine how ideas travel and transform, if at all, and then, to examine in the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengali crime narratives and detective fictions as to what possibilities of a woman detective was interred in the way detective fictions in India charted its course.

## 2.2. Detective fictions in England

The genre of detective fictions was impactfully launched in England in around 1850s when Edgar Allen Poe structured the figure of the detective who would undergo various ramifications to confer the genre of detective fictions with immense variety of forms and transactions. However, Poe's framework of the figure of the detective was an innovation that could be connected to different literary genres of eighteenth century England which dealt with crime and its intricacies. It must be remembered that this period also witnessed the rise of the genre of novel. The literatures which were considered precursors of detective fictions did not follow an overarching "generic or conventional form" which made these presentations "intrinsically contentious, willing to confront and disquiet rather than to comfort like the predominantly recreational detective fiction of later centuries" (Bell<sup>iii</sup>8). Hence these crime narratives, while dealing with the changing cultural, social and literary transformations of the times, also reflected on "the radical indictments of oppressive legal and penal systems which were in vogue at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Pykett<sup>iv</sup>, 'Newgate',19), thus invoking complications into the comprehension and narration of crime and its effects.

New gate Calendar stories (first appearance in 1773)<sup>v</sup> were registers of the lives and activities of criminals who were prisoned in New gate prisons in England. These stories presented the "spectacle of 'deviant' or socially transgressive behaviour" that

was countered by equally violent public display of punishments (Pykett, 'Newgate', 20). Their popularity not only depended on this sensational spectacle of violence, but also because these fictions incorporated within their ambit the erroneous penal system, crime, psychology of criminals, thus opening up avenues to fundamental queries like what is crime, thereby, hinting at the problematic of justice, and the restoration of the just world order (ibid: 21). There was a sense of pervading crisis which became quite disturbing because as these novels became popular, their mode of creating a voyeuristic display of the viciousness of crime began to be criticised as disruptive of the aesthetic sense of the art of novel writing which directed critics to re-evaluate the form and effects of the novel as a genre that it was being consumed by the rising middle class (ibid: 20-21).

Consequently as literacy rates in the country increased, and the print form gained prominence, especially among the middle class, both the reading material and readership was impacted by standards set through hierarchies of literature (Pykett, 'Newgate', 21-23). The sensation novels, which evolved during this period, garnered immense attention by dealing with the curious complexities of modern life. These transported crime and the criminal from the highways to the homes of the middle and upper class, thus completely overturning notions of safety, trust and security, and delving into deeper psychological, social exploration of the mind, explorations of the dark, social realities which lay entrenched within everyday living, thereby, opening up options for future explorations (ibid: 23). As the rise of the sensation novel coincided with the establishment of the new detective police in England in 1842, the plots also shifted focus from crime to detection, from "the spectacle of punishment to one morally managed by discipline" (ibid: 34), thus opening up avenues for the future detective figure, interestingly that of the amateur woman detective. While detection by women could be dated back to the gothic novels (Reddy 191), Mariam Halcombe in *The Woman in White* (1860) planted in popular imagination the prospects a woman turning into a detective for sorting personal injustices (Pykett, 'Newgate', 35), although foreshadowed by the constraints imbued by social and cultural stigmas attached to women generally.

However, unease with the idea of an individual enquirer lurked in a society that had already witnessed the complexities evolving out of the intrusion of spies in English

lives during the French Revolution (Knight, *Detection* 10). Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), which is also considered as a precursor of detective fictions, shows that "there is something evaluatively wrong with Caleb's desire to inquire" (ibid: 11), who being an individual cannot be the bearer and preserver of truth, as the figure of the detective is supposed to evolve into. While there is the presence of some sort of a quasi-detective in Edward Bulwer's *Pelham* (1828), Knight ascribes the presence of a powerful figure of the detective to the changing socio-political scenario of the time following utilitarian reform movements in numerous areas of British lives (ibid:13). Knight further contends that of the two different structures of power- sovereign and disciplinary- as argued by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), this period witnessed the transition from sovereign power, which "is realised in seeing the criminal personally resisting the power of the sovereign and so being publicly revealed as aberrant", to disciplinary power, which directs attention to the "central rational intellectual disciplining of the mind, and its constraining effects" which would "bear on perceiving and re-handling the patterns and problems of society" through profound institutional and professional activities (ibid: 13-15). Hence as crime writings continued to garner public attention, an intermittent visibility was conferred to the detective figure, in the face of societal and cultural transitions. Most of these figures coalesced detection with medicine or legal professions, emphasized on the workings of morality when dealing with crime and its retribution, but also opened up the possibilities for considering the presence of a professional figure, whose expertise could be available on hire, thus creating grounds for the professional detective to emerge (ibid: 32). Besides, the realistic police narratives<sup>vi</sup>, which emerged in England and France during this period, also served as a significant influence for the emergence of the detective figure.

### 2.2.1. The male figure of the detective

The magazines carried the impression of popular ideas and also provided space for experimentation with new notions. *Blackwood's Edinburgh's Magazine* (1817-1980), *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* (1837-1840), which Edgar Allen Poe edited from around 1839, also published sensation and gothic crime narratives, which occasionally featured a clever explanatory figure. These might have served as important influences for Poe who came up with his arm chair detective, Chevalier C Auguste Dupin, in 1841. Poe centred Dupin in Paris, which appealed to the sense of the exotic to



an English audience, and combined intellectual, imaginative and passive elements in the character with whom he launched his “tales of ratiocination”. This new emphasis on reason and logic shifted focus from the earlier sensual and sentimental elements in crime narratives to the intellectual and often, ambiguous elements in detective stories, where imagination as a method came to be stressed upon to contrive convincing connections (Knight, *Detection*, 26).

Women in Poe’s Dupin stories were victims, quite in keeping with the traditions of Victorian morality and the gothic narratives. Regarding the “brutal silencing” of the female victims in Poe’s narratives, Eva Burke<sup>vii</sup> suggests that, masculine superiority asserts itself by silencing the female victims, whether by physical destruction or psychological threat such as loss of reputation, thus rendering her incapable of ratiocination (46). In such a scenario, ratiocination becomes the male tool of decoding the causes of a woman’s physical annihilation by, what seems like, a symbolic destruction and muting of the female through death or invisibility. In these tales, therefore, female victimhood, violation and erasure of voice seem to be used strategically to emphasize the over-powering image of male ratiocination (ibid: 47-50). This idea is eventually extended to the later detective renditions where masculinity is not only equated with logic and reason, but also becomes normalised.

Poe’s detective, thus, became an assured stereotype which was repeated with modifications. Doyle’s detective, Sherlock Holmes, was highly intelligent, essentially moral, elitist, disciplined in knowledge and skills, eccentric, given to addiction, energetic, a master of disguise and in all this, a person who had his strings of life attached with the common crowd (Knight, *Detection*, 28). Appealing to a prevalent sense of masculinity, Holmes engulfed his audience with his interpretive magic which relied a lot on common sense, the highly observant nature, and a thorough reliance on rationality and reason. Holmes’ unfaltering, cold and aloof attitude, emotional distance from his cases, became the norms of the professional detective, which got eventually attached to the characteristics of masculinity that was considered standard for a detective. In fact, to allow Holmes to emerge as a definitely masculine character, the women characters were either made shadowy, or invisible. It is only in one of the six short stories, ‘The Scandal In Bohemia’ (1891), which Doyle was commissioned to write for the *Strand Magazine* (1891-1950), that a woman character, Irene Adler,

featured as an equal to Holmes in logical and reasoning capabilities, and in her art of disguise. Adler's characterisation was complex, and dismantled the prerogative of the masculine detective by turning the conventions of the game on its head, challenging the potential of Holmes himself and the conventional ideas of women. Yet, Doyle never repeated such a character in the rest of his Holmes oeuvre.

### 2.2.2. The Women Detectives Emerge

It must be noted that Doyle's creation of Irene Adler was not without precedence. In 1864, Andrew Forrester and William Stephan Hayward launched the first professional detective in *The Female Detective*<sup>viii</sup> and *Revelations of a Lady Detective*<sup>ix</sup> respectively. The introduction of the fictional woman detective, according to Slung, actually pre-dated the inclusion of women into Metropolitan Police in London which did not happen until 1882 (qtd. in Munt<sup>x</sup> 4). This hints towards experimentation involved in the creation of the fictional women detectives which might have been in response to the changing social status of women following the 'new woman' movements that gathered force during this period. However, to state that such a movement had brought about a radical change in the way women were perceived in the late Victorian society would definitely be a misnomer. The movement provoked questions and doubts about the conventional image of women in society and in fictions, and also incorporated the complexities emerging out of such entanglements.

Mrs. G in Forrester's *The Female Detective* (1874) validates the presence of a woman detective stating that "the woman detective has far greater opportunities than a man of intimate watching, and of keeping her eyes on matters near which a man could not conveniently play the eavesdropper" (Forrester 3–4), thus accepting the patriarchal idea of women as gossipmongers and eavesdroppers. But since resistance by women has most often taken recourse to resisting patriarchy with subtlety, what such an assertion, in turn, accomplishes is the use of prejudice as a tool for the woman detective to pass unnoticed. The invisibility generally accorded to women becomes a weapon for the woman detective. Positioned in-between the public and private realm, the professionally working woman has to continuously confront the stigmas attached to women's occupying the public sphere, and to women, in general, in order to be able to project herself as a convincing character. Thus, while being self-conscious about the transgression and incursion, the defensive types of feminine sleuths, prefixed with the

epithet ‘lady’ could also be found among the early formulations of the woman detective (Munt 16).

The transgressions were sometimes stark, often trying to react against the imposing of woman-like behaviour. Hayward’s ‘lady detective’ Mrs. Paschal, in *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, performs the “unladylike activities” as a detective in a racier fashion. The front cover pictures her smoking with an unflinching gaze at the reader, overturning the conventionally gendered subject position of woman, from being the gazed to the gazer. She is created as a delightfully independent and astute character who, quickly realising her natural potential for detection, takes up the job of a detective when her husband dies leaving her penniless. She is deft in carrying off disguises and complains about her conventional feminine dress that impedes her movement and which she often discards for professional purpose. This insightful, inventive and intuitive detective also flaunts a Colt revolver that allows her to depend on herself for her security. Here the ‘lady detective’ tries to operate with some rebellion against the conventionally accepted womanly behaviour; however, in doing so she seems to adopt masculine facets which reassert the necessity of masculinity in a detective.

This might be considered as reflective of what Heilmann<sup>xi</sup> points out as the male writers’ treatment of womanly ‘transgressiveness’ which eventually creates the degenerative women who is in want of moral and social respectability, and thus might be dismissed (*New Woman* 6). Women writers, who emerged during the ‘new woman’ movements, while continuously battling against the conventions of the sexes, were at least victorious in upholding women’s dissatisfaction at being caged by traditions and conventions. Although these fictions were shoved to oblivion, they were instrumental in projecting the rights and liberties of women which had entered the main stream of feminist ideas where the political battle for women’s rights was transformed into a personal battle of individuation.

#### 2.2.2.1. The ‘new woman’ in fiction and reality

The idea of ‘new woman’, which was mostly carried through the person of ‘new woman’, characterised among others by the *fin de siècle* moment in the continent, and emerged as a tool for voicing forth the demands of socio-political and cultural transformation with respect to the gendered spaces of existence, especially that of women. Thus, she posed a crisis to the hitherto established norms by questioning the

sagacity of the practised norms and intervened popular imagination through literary representations, making the changing mode and character of women's writings of the era more visible.

Heilmann and Beetham<sup>xiii</sup> point at a 'journalistic cliché' that existed in 1890's England where it was maintained that 'the new woman did not exist outside the pages of the periodical press' (*Hybridities* 2). What they argue is that although the periodical press was intrinsically bound to disseminating the idea of 'new woman', it also provided a discursive space for contesting the traditional ideas of femininity and masculinity which emerged, sometimes, as counter to, sometimes, as complicit with the idea of 'new woman' (ibid: 3). As such the period saw an unprecedented rise of women authors who rewrote the conventional images of womanhood, participated in the ongoing debates of the era, rebelled against the established gender ideology. Contradictorily, there were anti-feminists authors of the time who showed complete disregard of this new, emancipated woman, although they themselves practiced and lived within the ideological framework of the 'new woman' (Gavin and Oulton<sup>xiii</sup> 2). The 'new woman' writers of the age were, thus, considered 'authors of change' in a dual sense because while writing in a period of instability and social change, they acted both as agents and subjects of the change, contributing to the shifting times through their works and their person (ibid: 2).

However, Pykett<sup>xiv</sup> points out that the persistent criticism directed against 'new woman' writers undervalued their works to the extent that not only were they disregarded as being impactful, but the canon of late Victorian literature displays a veritable "filtering out of a great deal of writing, including virtually all of the fiction produced by women" (*Improper*3). When excavations into 'lost women writers' were undertaken during the second wave feminist movements, it was established how 'new woman' in England, both in fiction and in reality, moulded herself around notions of independence, freedom of movement, and self-development. While independence was related to metaphors of space which could be solely occupied by women, mobility allowed women to exercise their will towards choosing careers, which came to be deemed as a necessity for exercising and also projecting one's independence of mind and living. Consequently ideas related to marriage, courtship patterns, and work also underwent a change in approach.

Although many women writers considered the need to uphold and encourage domestic virtues among women of the era, there were quite some writers who advocated the need for women to engage in independent professional virtues, thus clearly stating the ambivalence that existed regarding working women among women who did work/write as professionals in the first place. As such many ‘new woman’ novels, which went on to making ‘new woman’ and ‘new woman’ writing their subject matter, foregrounded in the figure of the protagonist the problems of the woman writer herself (Pykett, *Improper*, 177). While the creative woman came to be reckoned as a ‘vehicle of celebrating female desire’ (ibid:178), the writing woman was indeed someone who, through the exercise of self-activity of writing, arrived at a certain self-realisation. Thus, finding herself on contradictory planes, trying to destabilise the stringent private-public dichotomy on which the gendered norms flourished, the woman writer decided to rework on the dichotomy by using tools of strategic compliance and contestation. It was either by using ‘feminine moderation’ (Heilmann, *New Woman*, 28) which was the way of moving between the home and the world with the ease of reporting from and about the workings of the domestic structure, or, by creating the idea of a freer public woman, who would have more freedom in engaging with her professional sphere being free from domestic responsibilities and exercising independence over both her career and her marriage (Gavin<sup>xv</sup>, “C.L. Pirakis”, 138) that women writers confronted the issue. As such, while in many instances it could be noticed that advancement for ‘new woman’ meant entering professions previously dominated by men, it could also be seen that contradictorily women writers who actually combined marriage, motherhood and career in their personal lives, created protagonists who would hardly do so. Thus while the narratives tried to accommodate “polyphonic voices” (Pykett, *Improper*, 8), Heilmann states that ensuing disruption of the unified self, reflected the “contradictions they grappled with as women, as writers and as feminists...” (*Hybridities*, 9).

#### 2.2.2.2. A ‘new woman’ detective: Loveday Brooke

The above discussion intends to create a platform for launching the woman detective in Victorian fictions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The increasing social, cultural and political participation of women of the fin de siècle in the public sphere, along with the emergence of the urban middle class working woman,

inevitably brought up debates pertaining to the dichotomy of the public and private spheres. While there has been a tendency to naturalise the division of the public and private spheres as two disjointed realms, the period provoked counter arguments about the fluidity of the spheres, the hierarchical nature of the division, and also how such a division has led to the systematic exclusion of women from the public life and has in turn politicised relationship within family, marriage and kinship, prompting debates and discussions across space and time.

Overwhelmed by what presented itself as contradictory concerns, the choice for women was always restricted to marriage or romance which helped conform to the stereotypical ideas of women. The same was true for women detective characters which evolved during this period. On one hand, the ‘new woman’ ideology under which these characters were produced enabled them to look beyond the domestic. On the other hand, they could do so only as unmarried women who seemed to spend the time gap doing something productive. Other fictional women detectives could be widows whose choosing of such a career was due to a sad trick of fate, thus legitimising the entry of the woman into the public life of a detective. Catherine Louisa Pirkis’ Loveday Brooke stands out as a character which not only tries to give voice to the idea of working woman, but also enfoldes the complexities that encompasses the idea, especially by being a woman who chooses a career over a man.

When we meet Loveday Brooke<sup>xvi</sup>, first in 1893, she is already a working woman detective; her struggles to be a woman professional are not discussed. Gavin points out that this presentation in itself is a subversion of Victorian gender norms where the woman’s entry into the public arena is not focussed upon, but more space is given to exploring how, being a woman professional, she retains and negotiates with the challenges when pitted against the public domain (“C.L. Pirkis”,140). While for most of these characters entry into the rare profession of a detective is mounted on a certain unavoidable excuse, and exit marked by marriage, Loveday remains an exceptional possibility.

Eagerly discussing a case with Ebenezer Dyer, “Chief of the *well-known* detective agency in Lynch Court, Fleet Street” (Pirkis, ‘The Black Bag’<sup>xvii</sup>) Brooke is already in the ascendancy of her career and at work. The third person narrator sparingly talks about a “jerk of Fortune’s wheel” which had thrown Loveday upon the “world

penniless and all but friendless”(ibid:). The choice of the profession of a detective had come “naturally” to her when she realised that “marketable accomplishments she had found she had none” (ibid:). At the face of such a crisis, she defied convention which cost her “her former associates and her position in society” (ibid:), thus, already hinting at the challenges she is negotiating with by choosing to enter the public domain. It is only when Dyer realised her potential and raised her in position at work that she regained the lost prestige and also counted professional gains and advancement. Thus, her choice of career does not subscribe to any excuse that is located beyond herself. Her domestic life is forever obscured from readers’ scrutiny to the extent that she is insistently presented as a working woman where her advancement in the career points at the desirable prospects for working women.

It is the case for a working woman that Pirkis puts up through her characterisation of Loveday Brooke who seems to be exclusively devoted to her profession, with no romantic possibilities lurking. In fact Pirkis chooses to veil Loveday’s personal life, so much so, that she is always seen at work but never at home, unlike Holmes. Nothing about her personal life is known except in one unassuming paragraph. The divide between the private person and the working professional is made distinctly clear when in the story, “The Ghost of Fountain Lane” she reproaches a client who intrudes into her privacy during a holiday. In Pirkis’ insistence to make Loveday a public woman, fully dedicated to her profession, Gavin finds traces of Pirkis herself. Gavin points out how zealously Pirkis veiled her personal life so that she refused to identify herself as anything other than ‘C.L. Pirkis’, which made both her marital status and her gender obscure (“C.L. Pirkis” 142). In order to portray the working woman in Loveday, Pirkis’ first sustained attempt at portraying a working woman, she zealously guards her against betraying any stance of the domestic woman which finds resonance with the idea of creating a freer woman in Loveday, endowing her with independence and mobility.

Loveday remains both unmarried and a professional at the end of the series. This might imply a complexity evolving out of the impossibility on the part of the writer to endow Loveday with a work-home balance. The blurring of the personal might also be symptomatic of trying to place the woman detective on equal footing with her male counterparts, who are usually seen without the baggage of a family.

While, on one hand, this might seem as a reassertion of the masculine notion of work and independence, it can also be seen as rebellion against contemporary notions associated with a woman's life. Singlehood becomes celebration of new freedoms and privileges which opens up new living spaces for the women in the city ("C.L. Pirkis" 8). Loveday's stories, therefore, become her 'experiences', adding a subjective dimension to it, and "implies the professional authority and wisdom that she has gained" (ibid: 148).

The predominance in showcasing her as a working woman is consolidated by a number of tropes. She is described with a series of negations: "She was not tall, she was not short; she was not dark, she was not fair; she was neither handsome nor ugly. Her features were altogether nondescript..." (Pirkis, "The Black Bag"). Therie Hendrey Seabrook is of the opinion that this nondescript appearance makes her a kind of 'everywoman,' allowing "the ordinary female reader to enter vicariously into the independence coupled with professional respect that characterizes Loveday's vocation" (qtd. in Gavin, "C.L. Pirkis", 78). Depicted always at work, the illustrations by Bernard Higham show her on duty, either travelling, or conversing, or thinking. The cover page of the book had Loveday's business card on it.

That her personal life is made so compulsively obscure stimulates scrutiny when we realise that by vocation she has always been placed at an in-betweenness of the public and private sphere, where she must depend on her experiences of the domestic world as a woman to reveal the secrets of the private realms. In fact her keen wits are invariably called to action, especially by the men, when the secrets of the domestic space are to be unfurled. Although she is provided with a plan of work by the male detectives she associates with, she goes on her way, asserting her individuality and often, destabilising the conventional prejudices directed against women. By ruffling up dichotomies therein, it is by virtue of her invisibility that she is able to bring to the fore the invisible and obscure others, thus adding more meaning to the politics of domestic space than merely occupying it. In her professional capacity Brooke is also seen travelling or staying at hotels without a male companion, and even walking down the streets at midnight. However, while comprehending the necessity of the occupancy of the public realm by the woman detective, it also becomes pertinent, for the times, that the woman is defended as respectable. As such, Brooke is conferred a Quaker-like



appearance, dressed invariably in black, shown in full view only when it is required for her work (Pirkis, “The Redhill Sisterhood”<sup>xviii</sup>). But she is shown to possess an impenetrable mind, thus reasserting the notion initiated by Poe that the detective is a thinking being. The challenge, however, lies in denying the masculine prerogative of the mind and conferring it to a woman. Working under social and cultural constraints, both Pirkis and her ‘new woman’ detective, Loveday Brooke, must constantly negotiate with the challenges thrown at them by the changing times. The intervention, or may be the incorporation, or simply the characterisation of a woman as a detective possessing the girth and individuality of Loveday, is to be considered with some seriousness as it was done during the heyday of the genre that was typically gendered.

The reasons behind briefing about some of the originary moments of the detective figure, both male and female, in English fictions is to provide a perspective as to the ideas of the detective figure which eventually travelled to India, and which did not. This might open up questions on the implicit ideologies working in the regional translations of the English detective fictions which were avidly consumed by the Indian middle class readership. Although the Indian corpus proliferated on its own, conversing with its socio-cultural and political peculiarities, it cannot be overlooked that it had been immensely influenced by the European canon. The above discussion might also serve to indicate those ideas which did not travel to India- the obscure silences about the compulsive presence of the women detectives and the complexities involved in their characterisation as could be seen in the popular detective fictions of the times in England. This might allow a scrutiny into the reasons for such differential treatment attributed to the English woman detective fictions by the Indian canon. While this might be ascribed to the politics of knowledge production and consumption, it might also allow us to comprehend the convergences and divergences which bear upon the social, cultural, political aspects of the Indian canon of detective fictions, may be even up to the present day.

### 2.3. Detective fictions in India

Crime narratives were not a novelty in Indian literature as may be noted from Sukumar Sen’s discussion on how the ancient Sanskrit texts could be referred to as sites where words describing crime, criminal and the detecting figure could always be located. Crime narratives, with a hint on the presence of a detecting figure, could be

found in Vedic prose narratives, puranas like *Mahabharata*, Kalidasa's *Abhigyanam Shakuntalam*, *jataka* tales, and other indigenous oral and written narratives, which testify to the fact that the treatment of crime in Indian narratives followed a certain structure which had traits by and large resembling the modern structure of the detective novel. In fact, while understanding the act of crime, and the consequent procedures of detection and resolution, these tales projected a moral standpoint which not only focussed on how good wins over evil, but also that good and evil co-exist. Sen evokes an oral narrative of Muldev and Shashi, to present the idea of how good and evil have a comingled existence, and how, in fact to understand evil, good must trace the steps of evil (56). It may, therefore, be inferred that the Indian tradition of crime narratives dwelled on complexities that went beyond the surface comprehension of good and evil, crime and justice, disorder and order. Crime, detection, retribution, failures in justice existed in oral and written narratives that pre-existed literary and new print-cultures.

Of the genres that gained popularity during the nineteenth century in Indian literature, Orsini<sup>xix</sup> considers detective fictions to be a 'genre introduced' through translations from English in Bengali, and then, from Bengali to other Indian languages at the end of the nineteenth century (436). While generating a flurry of writing and publishing activities, the detective novels also opened up scope to understand how meanings travelled from Europe, adapting themselves to situations that differed from that of the continent. Since detective fictions in India flourished in Indian languages, especially in Bengali as Orsini testifies, to study the ramifications of what such cultural embedding might have done to the structure of the detective novel, especially the figure of the detective, will create avenues to register the continuities and discontinuities that this genre embodies.

### **2.3.1. Detective genre in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengali literature**

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal saw a huge explosion of detective fictions which were consumed with such ardent rapidity that different authors, established and new, tried their hands in writing this form of fiction, although only a few were hugely successful. The sales records, as well as, promotional advertisements by authors of detective fictions themselves could stand as proof for such claims. Panchkari De, the most prominent among the writers of detective fictions during the

era, is said to have sold around eight thousand copies, while Priyanath Mukhopadhyaya's original work of detective fiction, *Darogar Daptar* (1893), is said to have been sold in around 217 volumes till 1912 (Dasgupta<sup>xx</sup>, 'Introduction', Vol. 1).

Yet there have been very few attempts to study such an interesting body of work that flourished in Bengal, in particular, and India, in general. Dasgupta rues over the fact that an exhaustive study of detective fictions in Bengali is not quite possible. This is mainly because, being considered with disregard this vast corpus of literature has not been preserved with caution in any one place or in the libraries for being taken up for posterity to study (ibid:). Again, since these books were always in popular demand most of the copies, which are strewn across libraries, are in such dilapidated condition that they cannot be used for a rigorous purpose like research (ibid:). Yet such a study is important, both historically and culturally, because the unprecedented popularity of detective fiction during that period coincided with the great socio-political upheaval of the time- the nationalist movement- of which detective fictions could bear significant imprints, being structurally embedded in the socio-cultural milieu which produces it, being affected and in turn affecting the ideas which emerge from the space and time with which it interacts.

### 2.3.1.1. The detective emerges in Bengali detective fictions

Sukumar Sen points out that detective fiction in its formal structure is bound to have come up only after the disciplinary police was created in India in 1861 by the Police Act V of 1861 (84). The formalisation of legalities set up the boundaries of acceptable behaviour which, in turn, became the measure of determining class, caste and religious hierarchies that became intensely complex when gender impinged upon these concerns. With such concerns making their way into society, it led to prioritising the *bhadralok* way of life in every aspect. The new form of detective fiction sought and found its newest readers among the Bengali middle class *bhadralok* who were already conversant with the European trends of detective fictions, having read the original, and the translations which were immensely popular in Bengal. These fictions invariably influenced the creation of indigenous detectives who had to be maneuvered to attune with *bhadralok* sensibility. The advertisement of Panchkari De's *Neel Boshona Sunduri*(1904) described the detective as a "veritable Gaboriau of Bengal in the plotting of his mysteries and a Conan Doyle in his detection"(qtd. in Dasgupta,

‘Introduction’, Vol. 1), thus, trying to ascribe to the trendsetters of European detective genre.

However, these fictions mutated themselves, in their course, creating versions that were informed by the local histories and contemporary conditions (Orsini 2004; Roy<sup>xxi</sup> 2017; Dasgupta 2016). They came to reflect upon the aspirations of the middle class Bengali *bhadralok* who was, by then, assured of the reducing possibility of emancipation through racially biased government jobs (Roy 2017; Dasgupta 2016). Besides, Bengali masculinity had to face constant condemnation for being weak, prone to diseases and being cowardly. The newly educated Bengali *bhadralok*, therefore, immersed himself in self-criticism when the colonial masters discriminated them as ‘non-martial’ race. In their intention to finding ways for being incorporated into the ‘superior’ colonial setup, the *bhadralok* became a health enthusiast leading to a culture of *bahubal charcha* (Dasgupta, ‘Introduction’, Vol. 1). This assertive culture of *bahubal charcha* came at a time when there was a rising need for physically strong, disciplined, upper caste, Hindu male heroes to stimulate men to join the nationalist movement which had already been triggered by the first partition of Bengal in 1905 (Roy 40-42). It is in the dovetailing of these moments of self-reflection that detective fictions, featuring male detectives, started gaining popularity in Bengal (Dasgupta 2016; Roy 2017).

The *goyenda* or detectives, therefore, became the epitome of that wishful Bengali masculinity which was capable of decisive action, heroic valour and physical dynamism, almost confirming to the idea of masculinity as understood by the dominant discourses of coloniality (Roy 39). The fictions that came out gave wings to the fantastical aspirations of the Bengali middle class *bhadralok* who found himself trapped within the limitations of the modern urban setup, and was drained by his dull, unchanging, monotonous *chakuri*, or service sector job. This *bhadralok* found himself pouring over the tales featuring the *bhadralok goyendas* “who moved with enviable freedom and imaginativeness from one act of dare devilry to the next...” (Roy 41). Identification of the readers with these detectives was based on another element- most of these detectives were localized, transformed into the identifiable Bengali *bhadralok*. Most of them were *chakurijibis*, jobs being one of most important aspect in the life of middle class Bengalis, and were amateur detectives or police detectives. However, the

drabness, which was associated with *chakuri* or job, for these goyendas had been transformed into a job with a scope for mobility, with unconventional hours of work, tremendous adventure and most importantly, with an option to choose the work. The job of a detective, being associated with the larger context of the nation, also created the idea of selfless service. Not only did these attributes glorify the job, but they also rendered it meaningful. In their exchanges with the colonial authorities, the *goyendas* remained unmoved by the authority of their colonial masters, thus epitomizing the inner urge for freedom and the nationalist pangs which was gradually gaining strength among Indians. This, Roy asserts, is a sort of racial subversion where the *goyendas* addressed the vehemently expressed need for a self-assured, physically dynamic upper-class Bengali hyper masculinity from the contemporary cultural nationalists in the face of what was seen as unrelenting colonial humiliation which had culminated in the arbitrary and insidious partitioning of Bengal in 1905 (46). It is significant to note here that although the idea of a fictional detective in itself is imaginative, to allow that imagination to extend to women still seemed well beyond possibility, given the socio-cultural and political context in which these fictions flourished which could not suit itself to an ambivalent partnership between women and crime. The hyper masculinized detective was easily consumed in the patriarchal society by men and also by women, who had by now become important as readers of regional literatures following reform measures taken towards women's education.

#### 2.3.1.1.1. The *Daroga* Narratives- Explicating the founding concerns of detective genre

The *daroga* narratives, both true accounts and fictional forms, penned by actual *darogas*, or inspectors, operating within colonial administration, pioneered as formal investigative literature before detective fictions in Bengali came up. The *daroga* narratives dealt with legal investigations of crime and the criminal procedures where every aspect of detection, from visiting the crime scene to technical support like forensic, gained prominence as *anushandhan*, literally meaning microscopic search. This indulgence for reaching the truth about crime became important in order to uphold the potential of the legal system during the Raj. *Darogar Daftar*, written by Daroga Priyanath Mukhopadhyaya, was serialized in 1889 in a monthly journal tellingly called, *Anushandhan*, after which it went on to be serialized in another monthly journal called,

*Darogar Daptari* (Dasgupta, 'Introduction', Vol. 1). These accounts were always projected by both the author and the publishers as true accounts of crime, basically, it seems, to harness attraction of the readers towards something original, something that was going on around us, thus, creating an appalling consciousness of reality. Hence the details of the cases were organized to form coherent narratives which began with a crime, and ended with the resolution of it, while allowing the truth about the criminal acts to surface. *Anusandhan* (microscopic search) was supposedly objective and unbiased, involving the *daroga's* special skills, whose binding authority was undeniable not only because he represented colonial authority but because his work was grounded on scientific rationality, meticulousness and objectivity- which was projected as quintessential of the colonial law (ibid: Vol.1). It might not be too much speculation to realize that the element of rationality that was incorporated into detective fictions by Poe had travelled far enough to be considered as an inherent element of such narratives. Moreover, although the *daroga* stories were quite different from the English police or prison narratives in their formalized structure and also literary presentation, the *daroga* narratives, besides opening up the domestic realm of the *bhadralok* for public scrutiny also projected the crevices in the legal procedures which was constantly influenced by gender, class and caste concerns, thereby problematizing the idea of restoring a just world order.

These *daroga* narratives consciously tried to attract the *bhadralok* reading public in order to earn credibility of being considered highly as literature, an attention that was denied to *battala*<sup>xviii</sup> literatures. It was so because being published for more than a decade from Bandhab Pustakalay and Sadharan Pustakagar presses in the *battala* areas it became essential for such publications to create a sense credibility for their content among the *bhadralok* readers since areas they were printed in were already considered unpalatable to *bhadralok* taste and consumption, at least in public. The publications, thus, insisted on their difference from the 'other' quintessential *battala* publications by highlighting their use of language and their presentation of content which was sanitized, sanskritised and sobered, especially with regards to gender, in order to attract *bhadralok* patronage (Roy 62). Secondly, in the atmosphere of growing apathy towards colonial administration, the narratives also had to be sensitive enough to connect to its *bhadralok* readers by subscribing to their contemporary concerns. Hence, presentations had an upper caste Hindu *bhadralok* angle with allegiances to

conservative norms which was centered around the sanctity of the Hindu *griha* (ibid: 62). Thirdly, the books had to emphasize on authenticity, on sharing their readers' mistrust of the growing boundaries of the cities, the continuous flow of people who were being rapidly accommodated into these ever increasing cities that were opening themselves up to opportunities which never existed earlier, especially with those related to women (ibid: 63). The books, thus, narrated '*prakrito ghotona*', real stories of deviant women, who acted upon opportunities of sexual independence, even economic independence, but who never found support from the narratives.

#### 2.3.1.1.2. **The *Goyenda* fictions- Explicating the concerns of detective genre**

Arindam Dasgupta maintains that the *daroga* narratives of Priyanath Mukhopadhyay, Bankaullah, and Girishchandra Basu definitely spurred enough enthusiasm for writing detective stories, mainly because of the huge commercial success that these stories garnered in an era when reading formed the most available pastime for a generation of newly educated house wives, young adults and also the *keranis*, the clerks in government offices, who had to usually commute long distances to reach their work places in the urban areas ('Introduction', Vol. 1). An investigation into the originality of content would reveal that in order to maintain a regular flow of detective stories that had gained immense popularity, it had become essential for Priyanath Mukhopadhyay, or Panchkari De, or Dinendranath Ghosh, to produce a steady stream of translated versions of detective fictions from Europe- English (mainly, Holmes stories) and French- as was the practice across the country (Niam, 2019: Daeschel, 2004). The ingenuity of the writers lay in familiarizing it for the indigenous readers by localizing the settings, by indigenizing the detective, who unlike the *daroga* is not a policeman, but a professional detective, while carving out content in keeping with contemporary prejudices. Detective fictions, therefore, carved out a life of their own, often comingling imported and local inspiration.

As the demand for printed literature in Bangla increased, it laid a favorable ground for publication of *goyenda* or detective fictions. By 1890s, when crime narratives started being published in book form, a new trend of crime writing emerged which showed increased influence of the Holmesian narrative structures. The plot now centered around one focal figure- the *goyenda* or detective- who was an exceptionally skilled, intelligent and independent male figure. The novels were, then, advertised in a

language which was not didactic, but unapologetically dwelled on being riveted page turners which readers could consume compulsively for the simple pleasure of finding out what happens next (Roy 65). The trend had already been set. These hyper masculinized *goyendas*, who were localized and possessed dazzling detective powers and agility, became perfect models for the region that was fuming with nationalistic fervor.

One of the most famous writers of early twentieth century Bengal, and also a publisher of detective fictions, who had amassed a huge fortune in the then Calcutta by writing, publishing and distributing detective fictions written by himself, was Panchkari De. De was also famous across the country via translations of his detective stories in Hindi, Gujarati, Telegu (Dasgupta, 'Introduction', Vol.1). In fact, he revolutionized the genre as well as the market of commercial fiction both by translating English stories and by writing original fictions, which were sometimes inspired by the European canon. His detective, Gobindaram, had been modeled initially on Holmes only to emerge as an independent character, popular enough to be translated into other Indian languages.

These *goyenda* or detective fictions moved out of the constrictions that subdued and moderated the content and language of the *daroga* narratives and seemed to combine attributes of *battala* literature and *daroga* narratives to suit their purpose. As sexual content became explicit, women began to feature in these crime stories as either villains or victims. While such content did not quite allow the genre to be considered with seriousness, in the representation of women both as victims and villains they were seen carrying out tasks that were unimaginable for women in that era, thus subtly overturning the conventional idea of the *bhadramahila*, the genteel woman. It is true that the narrative never sided with these deviant women who had had to endure disastrous consequences for their nonconforming act. However, it seems that these representations also voiced the inner fears of the *bhadralok* community regarding the changing dimensions of women's role in society, following the reform measures that were taken up to address women's issues, especially education. If these women could be seen as deviant, since they were deviating from contemporary norms, a woman detective would also be a deviant woman, who would have to establish herself as someone who could not be understood by the simplistic notions fueled by gender



biases. What is important to note here is that, the pressures on detective fiction to develop a form of literature that would be acceptable to *bhadralok* sensibilities by teasing out the tabooed content, insisting on a certain form of language, asserting the masculine figure to spur nationalistic sensibilities bore itself heavily on women. An incredibly popular genre of the colonial times became an exclusive domain for men- from writers to characters. The indigenous versions, which had not completely expunged the influences of the western sources, but had definitely incorporated vital changes so as to be able to speak differently to its audience, were immensely influential in building up the nationalistic consciousness in both men and women so much so that women seemed to have been completely zoned out from exploring the possibilities of what was considered as a commercial genre that catered to voyeuristic pleasure.

This happened at a time when women writers of both fictions and non-fictions were upcoming following a phenomenon of the *fin de siècle* moment in Bengal- the rise of the women writer- the *lekhika*. Women writers have always been there, acclaimed and well established. But this rise of the women writer during the colonial times is significant in a sense that women's writing was able to gain public visibility following the proliferation of printing presses, journals and other mediums which featured and encouraged women to write, read and engage. However, it is surprising that although literatures of crime and exploration of women therein had become almost inseparable in the literatures that flourished in Bengal in those times, neither men nor women writers tried their hands in creating women detectives during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The presence of women in crime literatures of the time, like the *battala* literature or the domestic novels, was restricted to their serving the roles of either a victim or an offender. In both cases their presence was reduced to being the offending bodies which were either the locus of unrestrained desires or unusual aspirations which made them transgressive feminine that the society was wary of.

The woman detective was not to be found any soon in these popular fictions which were still trying to sanitize their presence among the *bhadralok* readers- their target audience. Popular culture was considered to be a form of culture and practice in which a *bhadromohila*- the upper and middle class women who were mostly housed in the *andarmahals* (inner sanctuaries) of the *bhadralok* household- could not have a sanctioned presence. These cloistered *andarmahals*, once used to be comingled spaces

of exchanges where the lower class professional women, who were involved in daily domestic activities here, moved freely and thus, these spaces were marked by shared cultures of women. However, with the coming up of the category of *bhadramohila* as a segregated class of modern women who were educated and embellished with the high culture, this lower category of professional women started being considered with dread, given their potential to corrupt the emerging category of modern women. Hence women's writers writing into the genre of popular fictions also seemed to be restricted by such concerns. Sumanta Banerjee<sup>xxiii</sup> points out that with the spread of the new system of education 'a cultural homogeneity among Bengali women' (170) appeared through the creation of a new breed of *bhadramohila* culture. This culture was consolidated by the writings of the educated new woman who not only "displaced women's popular culture from Bengali middle class society" (ibid: 171) but was also responsible for limiting the scope of women emancipation. It could definitely be inferred from this that *bhadramohila* writings could not attach themselves to the themes and presentation which were normally marked as *battala* culture like crime narratives or detective fictions. Hence the insignificant ventures that women made into the field could find an explanation. Women journals like *Bamabodhini Patrika*<sup>xxiv</sup> and others constantly maintained a dichotomous stand where they advocated women emancipation while warning against the appearance of women in public. Public occupancy by women was derided vehemently until the nationalist movement brought women out from their homes to fight for the cause of the nation. But even that could not be equated with women's liberation, or freedom because ingrained within the nationalist agenda was the biased behavior towards women which always restricted their movements. It seems that it is by unearthing the fulcrum of the nationalist agenda, the 'woman's question', that one may be able to reach to a relevant critical understanding of the reasons behind the representation of women in these early examples of male detective fictions. Such an investigation might also open up avenues to weighing the possibilities of a woman detective in Indian fiction, whose occupancy of the public realm and association with crime, criminality could not be equated in conventional codes.

#### 2.4. Probing into the ‘woman’s question’: Evaluating the possibilities of the woman detective

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial Bengal had witnessed public sphere being transformed from an “expansive and adventurous” domain to an authoritarian, conservativist, and nativist realm (Sarkar<sup>xxv</sup>, *Hindu Wife*, 10). Sarkar analyses that the negotiations surrounding land among the colonial state, the land owning middle class of various gradations, and the peasants or tenants created extreme conditions of exploitation and economic crisis. Sarkar attributes the “roots of the transformation of a self-critical and liberal intelligentsia into a closed, status-quoist, chauvinistic one” (ibid: 11) to the intervention of the colonial state in between the landlord and the tenant. Such interventions created stage for massive peasant resistance, especially against the enforced cultivation of indigo, backed by the sympathetic middle class Bengali intelligentsia, which ultimately led to the evolution of a conscious, determined and autonomous political subject (ibid: 13).

The Pabna riots, according to Sarkar, made nationalists out of the Bengali *bhadralok* who, when he felt the privileges slipping out of control, articulated the need for nationalist struggle through “the motif of loss of caste and the loss of virtue of women” (ibid: 16). While the state intervened in uplifting the conditions of the lower caste, especially through education, the same reform measures also empowered women who could undercut the privileges and claims of the Bengali gentlemen, thus aggravating their insecurities. Thus, the consistent insecurities that developed made the middle class Bengali *bhadralok* politically sensible to the structures of social authority which were to be made more stringent, especially in the realms of gender relations, so that the trend was not only to “conserve tradition, prescription and custom but also to construct elaborate arguments in their defence” (Sarkar<sup>17</sup>). What turned out to be problematic in this defence was that all of this depended on indigenism. Any form of resistance against it was considered as “mimicking of the Western colonial knowledge, while status-quoism was linked to the survival of authentic norms” (ibid: 16), thus trying to impose such notion on the marginalised, the lower castes and more so, on women.

While probing into the causes of the disappearance of the debates concerning the ‘woman’s question’ at the beginning of the twentieth century, Partha Chatterjee<sup>xxvi</sup>

tries to understand if its absence from contemporary debates was rooted in the fact that most sections of opinion in Bengal had found a satisfactory resolution of the ‘woman’s question’. Chatterjee points out that it becomes imperative to fathom into the very assumptions of nationalist ideology in order to comprehend its workings with the ‘woman’s question’. In fact, Chatterjee argues, that nationalism did stand up to the new social and cultural problems, and did resolve the ‘women’s question’ in complete accord with *its* preferred goals (ibid:311). He identifies contradictory pulls of nationalist ideology in its struggle against the dominance of colonialism and the resolution it offered to the contradictions therein. The resolution was built around, firstly, the separation of the domain of culture into two spheres- the material and the spiritual. The material sphere with its emphasis on technological advancements, its claim to rationalize and reform the traditional culture of the natives, was the sphere where Western civilization appeared most powerful. However, the Indian nationalist argued for a selective acceptance and endurance of the material culture by the Indian people who had a superior spiritual culture: “What was necessary was to cultivate the material techniques of modern western civilization while retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of the national culture” (ibid:312).

This material/spiritual distinction got further condensed into ideologically more powerful dichotomies of the inner and the outer which came to be applied to the social sphere as “*ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world” (ibid:313). The outer/*bahir*/world was the material, external domain, the domain of the male, where adjustments were required to sustain. However, it remained unimportant in comparison to the inner world. The inner/*ghar*/home, on the other hand, was the true essence of life that should remain unaffected by the profanities of the outside world. Women represented this domain. Chatterjee argues that before this dichotomy and its consequent application could be pointed out as traditional or conservative, it would be important to note that in the nationalist mind this was a new formulation at that time using which the nationalist struggle could be fostered (314). Hence, nationalist ideology gained currency from this notion which, they believed, could alone confer a distinctive identity to the East by retaining of their superior spiritual culture that became the inner core of national culture for the nationalists which was crucial for them to protect, preserve and strengthen. So they adopted a dichotomous stand- “in the world, imitation and adaptation to western norms was a necessity; at home they were tantamount to annihilation of one’s very

identity” (ibid: 314). Thus applying the ideological principle of selection, the nationalist attempted to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project. Hence westernization of Bengali women became the subject of social parody which found expression in every form of literature of the period. Although the creation of this idea of the Bengali woman turning into a western *memsahib* was not consistent with reality, it was basically a criticism of manners – in dressing sense, reading habits and others- which was seen as a threat to the inner sanctity of the *ghar*- the home. As the nationalist discourse gained impetus, all attempts of ‘locating the position of women in the modern world of the nation’ (ibid: 316) became important.

The emergent middle class in Bengal found themselves threatened by the various conditions and contradictions that the colonial rule had brought which made them anxious of saving their homes, their inner identities. Thus the onus of preservation of culture was vested more on women who were held responsible for keeping up the sanctity of the inner spiritual space. The masculine/feminine domain that, thus, evolved, further made the domains water tight- men would bear the brunt of the outside material world, while women would be the preserver of the site of inner spirituality- thus “expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture” (ibid: 319). Although changes in the external conditions of the life of women were acceptable, it was imperative that they retained their inner spiritual (i.e. feminine) virtues. Social reforms were molded to be in consistency with the requirements of the nationalist project. Thus, the idea that men and women could be westernized, but with a distinction, was responsible for the ways in which the relation of women with nation, family and work was perceived.

Problems with regard to comprehending the application of these dichotomies of home/world, masculine/feminine, spiritual/material concerning the everyday life of ‘modern’ women emerged with the rapidly changing situation of the middle class homes. As the changes were made consistent with the nationalist projects, it was seen that “the ‘new’ woman defined in this way was subjected to a *new* patriarchy” (ibid: 321). The ‘new woman’, while remaining distinguished from the traditional common woman, would also have to be distinct from the westernised woman. In fact the ‘new woman’ was to be marked by her efforts to attain superior national culture which would in turn project her freedom as a woman. In this respect, Chatterjee cites the case of

women's education which has been the most contentious subject of the 'woman's question' debate.

While traditionalists rejected the idea of schooling for women, the end of the nineteenth century saw tremendous rise in women's education due to the increase in the establishment of indigenous schools. This was made possible by the development of educative literature in Bengali language which flourished, not only because much of the content of the curriculum was feminine and seemed untranslatable in English, but the need to translate it in English, the language of the external world, seemed unnecessary as women would always operate within the household where western education in any form was considered a threat. This sanitised way of offering freedom to women became necessary as women would have to bring up able sons for the nation.

All efforts to reform the materials of education and dissemination helped shape the new literature in Bengal. The 'new woman' became creative contributors to this new literature which was disseminated mainly through Bangla. It is through these disseminations, often carried out by women themselves, that ideological understandings, like women could receive formal education without jeopardising her place at home, gained enough currency. To be able to gain this education was made to look like a personal challenge that women must overcome using their will to uplift themselves. To achieve this education was to achieve freedom and to place oneself at a higher cultural ground. Reform, thus, created avenues to emancipate women, but with strategic limitations.

Education, therefore, was supposed to inculcate in women the virtues that would help her to formulate a kind of disciplining of the household to equip it to confront the new physical and economic condition of the outside world. She would venture into the outside world as long as she could keep her femininity intact which in turn helped to consolidate the socially acceptable male and female behaviour. Femininity was marked by spiritual qualities in her way of life which would bear the burden of compensating the inability of men to inculcate such spirituality due to the trials and tribulations of the material world which was their designated domain. Interestingly women were endowed with mobility, the flexibility to occupy both the public and the private domains, but on terms dictated by the new patriarchy. Women were by now idealised either as mother or as goddess, in keeping with the image of

*Bharat Mata*, while the tropes tended to erase her sexuality. Women who failed to conform to such ideational values were marked as deviants. This fulfilled the nationalist agenda of women's emancipation which removed controversies regarding women's question from the public arena while new womanhood was being actualised within the domains of the home, evidences of which are present in documents that took shape within such confines.

Under the contradictory pulls of reform movements that tried to empower women of all classes and the call for the conservation of traditionalism and indigeneity, women of the upper and middle classes found themselves in grave insecurity and crisis. The rootlessness of these women finds an apt expression in Sarkar's words- "They (women) would remain somewhat incomplete class and caste subjects, permanent refugees, in a sense, in both households" (19). The exploitation of women often left the caste and class distinctions blurred due to the exploitative measures that were operative against them especially within the middle and upper class households. Detective fictions of the period embodied these popular sentiments, being a product of mass culture. While the characterisation of the male detectives became subjects of experimentation, and thus attained fluidity of structure and indigenous manoeuvres, the women in these fictions were seen to be consistent with the nationalist project where they were either supposed to maintain the sanctity of the inner domain- the home- or considered deviant. If women were allowed to occupy the public space, or project themselves as emancipated subjects, it had its own limitations.

### **2.5. Women in early Bengali crime narratives and detective fictions**

The roles that women served in early crime narratives or detective fictions in Bengali, which focussed on the male prerogative of rationality and perception of the social and cultural framework, was that of either a victim or a vamp. *Battala* publications, which also included numerous texts about crimes presenting the ever changing contours of legitimate and illegitimate behavior, could also be seen as narratives where gender was a fiercely contested terrain for publicly fought debates on law, sexual relations, reform, cultural as well as class and caste-related identities and ideas of nation (Roy 22). Even as female emancipation was urged by certain sections of society there was always paranoia about possible gendered transgressions and about the use of sexual agency by women, which was strongly opposed by *bhadralok* writings

(ibid: 25) and the brewing ideology of nationalism. These crime narratives, which were basically modeled as domestic narratives, did not focus on the act of crime, but drew upon the unresolved and complicated issues which centered on familial and sexual relations within the private domain. The “unjust asymmetries of power as well as the consequences of repressing unsanctioned desire” were brought to the fore which opened up the seemingly unproblematic surface reality of domestic and social relationships for closer scrutiny (Roy 32).

Criminality in domestic spaces can also be seen in other literatures of the period, like in Bankim’s novels, where he tried to explore transgressions, especially by female sexuality. Although such novels were far from meeting the requirements of the prevalent reform measures, these novels laid bare the intricacies of violence that silently occurred in the *antahpur* (interior) of *bhadro* households, which was kept invisible under the pretext of maintaining the sanctity a Hindu *griha* (home), the epitome of inner spirituality which must be protected at the face of Western materialistic intrusion. The monolithic idea of the Hindu *griha*, which got eventually tied up to the idea of the nation, remained as the last unconquered space for the colonized Bengali *bhadralok* who, despite his intentions of being a good legal subject of the colonial authority, protested against any encroachment on the norms controlling the *griha*.

The compliant, dutiful Hindu *ramani* was at the centre of the Hindu *griha*, both constructions being considered as a monolith. The body of the Hindu *ramani* was ‘the locus of unconquered purity...moulded from infancy by a *shastric* regimen’ (Roy 36). Even most women writers, who were writing and publishing during this era, also attested to the ideals of the domestic space. Resistance to these constricted ideas of femininity which emanated from these constricted spaces was few and far between. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, the magazine whose impact and reach was immense as it was dedicated towards awakening women to wisdom and excellent mentality, also carried articles that mostly spoke of domesticity as a sacred occupation for women. It seems that the paranoia of the disintegrated *griha* was tied to the possibility of a threat that emancipated women posed who could eventually disrupt the sanctity of the idealized domestic space by refusing to obey norms and flaunt her awareness of being a rights-bearing individual (Roy 11). The notion of female empowerment was, therefore,



perceived with immense skepticism and prejudice. The idea of *nobeena* or 'new woman' was a subject of constant ridicule as she was imagined as mercurial, indolent, narcissistic, manipulative and unchaste. Thus, a sort of idealised femininity could not allow the *bhadramohila* to be seen in police stations or involved in judicial or legal complexities (ibid:25). There emerged a need to establish the identity of women as *purdahnasheins* in order to be taken seriously into consideration. As these early detective fictions were being engineered to deliver to the nationalist project, women characters were devised to underline the idea of acceptable behaviour by women, that which fitted to the notion of an ideal *bhadramohila* in accordance to the nationalist project. Thus, while on one hand, the detective fictions of the day were being used as a vehicle to impregnate men with the rising nationalistic ideology, it also became prescriptive for women who were to be moulded into a frame that would eventually facilitate the movement and indoctrination of the idea of the nation. Again, it was upon the bodies of the victimised women and the vicious vamps that the sensationalistic crime stories found their most favourite grounds, given the gendered orientation of tabooed subjects.

The crime narratives, therefore, seemed overtly preoccupied in dwelling on the biases that informed social and cultural operations. Women who dared to step out of the fold were not only derided as aberrations but were also shown as suffering the consequences of their acts. This would in turn make the readers, who were mostly women, weary of too much independence and too many choices. These continued to present the grisly narratives of sensation mongering gossip that peered into the highly protected *bhadralok antahpurs*, a sacrilege that titillated, but demeaned any overt connection between women and crime.

However, contrary to what these early crime and detective fictions expected to deliver, the sensation and attraction that these tried to weave into the structures of the fictions, for accelerating consumption and also for meeting readership demands, made these fiction dependent upon the eventual indulgence in tabooed subjects, among which popular demands steered towards the portraiture of the deviant woman- the transcendent femininity- who threatened contemporary patriarchal ideas and also challenged the masculine authority. They were seen to occupying public spaces, expressing their subdued desires, being conscious of their material rights, having a

sense of independence and possessing a mind of their own, which problematized the notions of ideal femininity and opened up avenues for the idea of the ‘new woman’ to enter the consciousness. Although the narratives never sided with them, the very creation of that expression of autonomy inadvertently made them the vehicle for creating the idea of such autonomy. Thus, despite the conservative closures of these texts, the uncomfortable questions raised by the construction of these ‘criminal’ women about the ambivalences that marked *bhadralok* culture which was struggling to accommodate gender-related reform and modernity refused to find convenient closures (Roy 194). The tussle was huge.

An apt example of such transgressive characterisation brought up by Shampa Roy is that of Mohini from Panchkari De’s detective novel, *Mayabi* (1901) (79-83). Mohini, disregarding the dictates of her *kula*, her creed, giving up her *dharma* as a woman, allows her constraint to slip away when, emancipated by her *stridhan*, her property, she ventures on the autonomous act of eloping with Binod, alias Phool Babu, who eventually betrays her. The narrative cautiously weaves the tragic consequences emanating out of Mohini’s act of independence, so much so that she resorts to self-flagellation and humiliatingly bestialises herself for her actions. When towards the end, after she avenges Binod’s injustices towards her by helping the detective, Arindam, to arrest Binod, she evolves as a liberated woman who is now set free. Disillusioned by the injustices laden upon her by the patriarchal society, she walks down the road, dishevelled and alone, with no care, as the conservative detective looks on with disbelief at her transformation. While the narrative criticises her for using her agency, interestingly, it is by the use of the same agency that she resorts to revenge, to criticising the patriarchal structures of society and lays bare the oppressive mechanisms used to subdue women which ultimately instigates women to vehemently break out from those, inviting their own downfall. Mohini represents the ‘new woman’, the *nobeena*, although in an extremist way instead of being a moderate feminine. Mohini exemplifies the nature of permissible and impermissible behaviour that women in Bengali detective fictions must encounter and transcend.

### 2.5.1. The ‘new woman’ in detective fictions: Evaluating Satyabati

As the indigenous figure of the male detective consolidated his dominance in Bengali literature, male detective fictions also tried to respond to the changing demands

of the time by incorporating the ‘new woman’ into its frame. But such incorporations were sensitive to impose the necessary restrictions on the emancipatory attitude of such women, so that the inherent patriarchal structure of the fictions remained intact, thus making the dichotomous stand of the social and cultural domains as explicated by Chatterjee well pronounced. The adventurous, lonesome, amateurish detective figure, intending to perform duties for the society and the nation, at large, became the independent, professional, Bengali *bhadralok* who would charge fees for consultation, while unravelling the gruesome complexities of the *bhadra* Bengali households, while himself becoming part of the changing social structure. Saradindu Bandhyopadhyaya’s Byomkesh Bakshi is one such character. Byomkesh was designed to not only explore the genius of the detective or the ingenuity of crime and the criminal mind in the transforming *bhadralok*, Bengali, urban settings, but was also created to completely indigenise the detective figure by absorbing him into the social structure that he investigated into. Hence Byomkesh’s personality was given two dimensions- one as a professional detective, another as a Bengali family man. While the Bengali reading audience, the main target of Bandhopadyaya, found themselves completely taken over the familiarity that Byomkesh projected in his attitudes, clothes, conversations, habits, the stories in the series also continuously kept playing with the ideas of women’s position in society- mostly by exploring the characters of the female criminals or victims, along with that of Satyabati, Byomkesh’s wife, whose presence made the aspect of family life well pronounced, while also consolidating Byomkesh’s *bhadralok* image.

Satyabati first appears in the story “Arthamanartham”<sup>xxvii</sup> (1933) in which Byomkesh investigates the murder of a Bengali *bhadralok*, Karalibabu. Byomkesh meets Satyabati, Karalibabu’s niece and an inmate of the house, during cross-examination. Satyabati raised the alarm of Karalibabu’s death when she brought him the morning tea, a routine activity of Satyabati. Moreover, the weapon of murder, a needle that was threaded with black thread, which was poked into Karalibabu’s neck thrice leading to his death, also belonged to Satyabati, the only woman in the house with whom a womanly activity like needle work could be associated. Satyabati, and her brother, Sukumar, are orphans living with the affluent gentleman, Karali babu, who was a man of bitter temperament. Sukumar and Satyabati were both pursuing higher education- Sukumar in medicine and Satyabati in college, when the story begins. Ajit,

the narrator of the story, describes Satyabati as a dark complexioned, non-descript girl of seventeen-eighteen years who seemed quite deranged by the condition of the house. While all are almost convinced of a *bhadramohila* like Satyabati's innocence, Ajit notices in her a visible defiance when Byomkesh cross questions her. She is found to be curt, adamant and quite stubborn in her replies. Her voice, her demeanour, almost everything about her projected a sort of rebellion and disgust against Byomkesh, which made him consider her with more suspicion, while also being attracted towards her. In her defiance she appears to rebel against the normative behaviour of women- she is not weak. He finds himself at his wits end when Satyabati does not cooperate, although without showing any obvious signs of rebellion. She maintains an attitude of complete insolence in her gestures, a cold distant attitude, and does not divulge anything even at the face of Byomkesh's rigorous query. Her sagacity and strength of mind both irritates and captivates Byomkesh who finds her to be no ordinary girl (Bandhopadhyaya, 'Arthamanartham', 112).

At the face of extreme danger, Satyabati also shows immense courage to come over to Byomkesh's house which leaves both Ajit and Byomkesh flabbergasted. Ajit gives an account of his reactions at Satyabati's sudden appearance:

"I had seen Satyabati only once before this appearance; she never seemed any different from any ordinary, educated, Bengali girl. Hence that at the face of grave danger, surpassing all boundaries of hesitancy and indecision, she could actually turn up to our place, was beyond our expectation. Most Bengali girls shrink away at the sight of danger, become almost invalid. But this dark complexioned girl evolved as a brilliant, extraordinary woman before my eyes. From the worn out *nagrai* on her feet to her unkempt hair, she emerged as a spectacle of extraordinary capabilities" (ibid: 116).

Thus, while Satyabati is placed outside the boundaries of ordinary Bengali women, she cannot be a transgressive woman, one who is not desirable by the modern Bengali *bhadralok*. But Satyabati seems to be a new formulation where her nature, following her educational training and also her upbringing, is more imbued with reason, logic, and as one who does not have the unnecessary meekness in projecting her wants and desires. What makes her extraordinary is not her beauty or her nimble feminine attitudes by which the male gaze commonly gauges a woman's attractiveness, but her strength of mind and also her capacity to understand crime and the ways of detecting it.

In her revelation to Byomkesh about the night when Karalibabu was murdered, she admits to have known about Karalibabu's death in the very night. She held on to her nerves, did not raise an alarm realising that all circumstantial evidences were against her brother, Sukumar, who could never commit such a crime, and whom she was determined to protect. Byomkesh is extraordinarily impressed by her determination and presence of mind, quite an unlikely woman, he confesses. However, being the modern Bengali *bhadralok*, caught in the web of old and new ideals, what crosses Byomkesh's mind once she leaves, is this:

“Satyabati cannot be considered beautiful, is it not?... she would generally be considered dark complexioned” (ibid: 120).

A reassertion of patriarchal stereotypes it seems! Satyabati does not meet the prevalent standards of beauty; but her intelligence, sagacity, strength of mind and independence of will makes her stand apart as a 'new woman', and hence capable of grasping the attention of the suave, intelligent, Bengali *bhadralok goyenda*. Positioned in a transitional phase of redefining societal norms, the detective seems to have opened himself up to new ideas of appreciating and understanding womanhood, where strength of character and presence of mind in a woman were appreciable qualities. However, the reassertion of the above stereotype projects that which is still considered to be the most marketable accomplishment of women- beauty- the lack of which might be compensated by brains, although beauty does not stand dismissed. The lonesome male detective gets married and enters the societal structure, quite unlike the English counterparts. But the question which crops up is related to how the character of Satyabati develops after she becomes a constant companion of Byomkesh.

Satyabati is not present in all the stories after her first appearance in “Arthamanartham”. Of the thirty-three stories she appears in only sixteen of them where her roles vary from being merely mentioned, or merely appearing, to playing a part, mostly bringing forth the domestic of Byomkesh's life. Her significance or contribution to the Byomkesh stories lies in fulfilling the fact that Saradindu's intention of situating Byomkesh within the ambit of society, of making him familiar as the Bengali *bhadralok* was made possible by the presence of Satyabati as the woman who kept the sanctity of the *griha* intact, while Byomkesh traversed the unholy material

world. The presence of Satyabati also helped to break the monotony of high seriousness of the complex cases. Thus, Satyabati could be considered as a sort of comic relief.

Satyabati, the upfront, college going girl is, thus, sent into the private space where she takes up wifely duties of care, nurture and also company. It is the conjugal strifes and makings-up that provide elements of comic relief in the otherwise tense plots. It is also through the conversation with each other that help bring out the sagacious Bengali *bhadralok*, who puts up the appearance of being the dominated half within the private sphere, while allowing his wife to take the commanding position in women's realm- the domestic sphere. This arrangement does not break down the web of patriarchy that makes its way into middle class Bengali households, but rather tries to consolidate the patriarchal division of public and private spheres, where the woman is supposed to be assigned and pinned to womanly duties that she must perform with enough command and adulation, often confining herself within these roles which do not allow her any emancipation. Satyabati tries to voice her concern about the changing position of women, about their rights, expressing her support to social causes like widow remarriage ('*Chitrachor*', 1951) and tries to understand the insecurities laden on women by societal standards. She delves into the psychological condition of a wife thereof, often, to the dismissal of the narrative itself. She remains a distant voice; but nonetheless, a voice. Yet her sagacity or presence of mind, which had once impressed Byomkesh, is not explored or enhanced further within the stories. She is made to relegate within the private sphere where she dons the hat of a caregiver. Hence although she sparks the possibilities of the induction of prominent *bhadramohila*, genteel women characters in detective fiction, her potential as a detective is strategically left unexplored.

## 2.6. Still searching for the woman detective: the *lekhika* emerges

However, as it has also been observed in case of the projection of deviant women who definitely projected their use of autonomy, the slightest autonomy that reform measures endowed upon women was able to incite many women to use their agency to attest their freedom. While the era provided avenues for women to think and understand their conditions from a renewed perspective, it also witnessed the rise of women writers- *lekhika*- making the opinion of women available through the printed word. These women writers had variants that ranged from women who were associates

of the nationalist projects and who attested the nationalist agenda of women's emancipation, thus becoming complicit subjects of patriarchy, to women who practised moderate feminine rebellion, and who were radical feminists. There were women writers who rose against the oppressive religious systems, celebrated modernity and its resources for women, in whatever meagre terms that might be. It is to these women writers that the future of the novel belonged and it was also left to these women writers to explore the possibilities of the woman detective.

Tanika Sarkar points out that in late nineteenth century middle-class context the politics of associations, of self-governing bodies and of lower class protests acquired immediacy and substance largely through the mediation of vernacular printed journals (24). These journals described these developments in close and vivid details, and opened up the activities for widespread debates and comments. The debates also entered the domestic sphere as women gave fervent expressions to the domestic issues in their writings, which not only reflected the impact of debates in public, but in turn impacted public debates. Printing transformed reading practices while creating newer possibilities. As reading became a regular everyday activity, vernacular presses developed. As education in schools had already been affected by changes due to the incorporation of printed texts, vernacular printing allowed the proliferation of literature by the incorporation of various themes which increased the scope of incorporating more authors. According to Sarkar, "a cross-section of thinking men and a few exceptionally fortunate women" (ibid: 26) developed the acumen to debate with the issues pertaining to their daily lives, their deprivation under the colonial rule, and also propagate their ideas pertaining to nationalism. In fact as literatures became the medium to propel people towards the nationalistic cause, literatures also became a strong defendant of traditionalism and prescribed the role of the Hindu wife as the bearer of customs and rituals which could keep the community insulated from the demeaning influence of colonialism, consolidating the separation of the material and spiritual worlds. While many women writers endorsed this burden of traditionalism, there were quite a few women writers who attacked such notions. From around 1860s when women writers were coming up as a phenomenon in colonial Bengal, there has been a constant attack on the disillusionment of loveless marriages, the trauma of child marriages, the everyday activities of brutality and coercion within the households. At the same time many women writers constantly decried the loss of language and modes

which could allow them to give expression to their conditions, to break down the patriarchal modes of expressions, by which they could uplift their situation.

In another way, it might be inferred that this subtle oppressive ideology which was instrumentalised by the new patriarchy definitely had its own boons. Since educational reforms for women were most stressed upon, it threw open avenues and opportunities, however, partially at the beginning, for women to come out of the constricted cages and express themselves, especially through writing. While women organisations came up to allow women to meet and exchange ideas, women magazines were brought out to address the need for a large number of educated women. It is not that all such writings advocated women emancipation, as we comprehend in contemporary terms, but the very act of writing, the meetings in public and the running of all women organisations were in itself a step towards reforming the social order. Although the segregated identity of such gatherings can definitely be considered with irony, it must be understood that these organisations made it possible for women to meet outside their private spheres which in turn energised innumerable women to emerge as women writers. Since women have been complicit subjects of patriarchy, many such writings can be found to be consistent with the nationalist resolution of the 'woman's question'. But, as Forbes<sup>xxviii</sup> contends, the reform movements of the period advocated the rise of women's voice which allowed them to manifest the deepest concerns of women like "'tearing the purdah', 'breaking out of the cage', and 'escaping from bondage'" (13). What seemed to be the problem, according to Forbes, is that being subordinated and oppressed within jarring systems of patriarchy themselves, they could not provide with a coherent vision of what they could achieve as emancipated women (ibid: 14); hence the contradictions.

This subtle restriction created quite an impact on various women issues which directly challenged the issue of nationalism. In fact the contradictions within the women's organisations and movements themselves regarding issues related to purdah or sex- seclusion continued to make the notions of mobilisation and choice ambivalent. Women's education became the central issue of these organisations which allowed women to ultimately gain their footing into the hitherto banned social and political arena, although their entry was always dependant on the rhetoric of the "...enlarged role for women who could bring their special 'womanly' talents to improve the world"



(Forbes18). Thus, the movement of women out of their inner domains was highly dependent on whether women were being able to fulfil their roles that they were required to fill in. Such subtle paralysis was meant to impede their mobility beyond that which was stipulated for them by the social structure. Hence when in the late nineteenth century education of women was considered to be consistent with the nationalist project of women emancipation, it was the sort of education which would make them more 'fit' for household work and daily life which in turn restricted the scope of curriculums, but also consolidated prejudices like secluded studies for women. No allurements, be it scholarships or grants-in-aid could dispel the firm prejudices against education for employment. While women belonging to lower classes and castes always formed the body of working women, for women belonging to the upper and middle classes, work constituted that which was within the constrictive space of a home. Consequently English education was feared as it "became synonymous with securing paid employments which could lead to creating independent thinking, competition in work force and finally "disintegration of cultural norms" (Forbes 20). In such a scenario although the 'new woman' exercised her independence to educate herself, earning a livelihood through education was not within the scope of imagination of either the families, or for the women themselves.

#### 2.6.1. Women on the other side: As detective fiction writers and as detectives

By the time woman started writing detective fictions with vigour, the fictional Bengali detective considered detection as a profession. As such it became impossible for women to be incorporated into a genre which had professionalized the masculine ideals surpassing which would mean rebelling allegiance to the *bhadralok* sensibilities. Very few women writers tried their hands in writing detective fictions, basically it seems, because of the popular demand of the genre, although they restricted their imagination to the male detective. The insistent masculinity of the genre made writers like Sushma Sen write two detective stories for Dev Sahitya Kutir's *Prahelika* series featuring her male detective, Shailen Choudhury. Pratiba Basu created the character of Antu, an eleven year old boy detective. In the *Kanchenjunga* series, which was also published by Dev Sahitya Kutir, Shailabala Ghosh Jaya focused on the young male adult detective, Jimutbahan Kar. Saralabala Debi, who won the coveted 'Kuntalin prize' for writing her detective story "Ghori Churi" (c. 1910) the first detective story by

a Bengali woman writer (Sen 143), also had a male detective, Shudhangshu Shekar Basu (Ghosh<sup>xxix</sup> 39). It is interesting to note here that, *Bharati* magazine, which became instrumental in consolidating the genre of detective fiction in Bengali by serialising award winning detective fictions by Nagendranath Gupta, Haroshdhan Mukhopadhyaya, and Dinendrakumar Roy, was edited by Swarnakumari Debi for a long time.

A few women detectives who found expression through male writings were aged women, mostly *pishis* and *thakumas*, living in rural settings, whose skill for detection evolved from an amateur curiosity in the happenings around them. Sourindranath Mukhopadhyaya wrote “*Bindi Pishir Goyendagiri*”<sup>xxx</sup>, where Bindi *pishi* (aunt) is an unmarried, old woman of around fifty years, who lived in her ancestral home in the village by choice while her brothers lived in the cities. Since translation of Agatha Christie stories have always been rampant within the genre of Bengali detective fictions, Bindi *pishi* seems to be an indigenized version of Miss Marple. Akin to Miss Marple, not only is the setting of the story removed from the city to the village, Bindi *pishi* also takes keen interest in the happenings of the surroundings as narrated to her by her maid. An example of an armchair detective, Bindi *pishi*, while being engaged in sewing complicated designs in the *kathas* she made, resolved complicated issues with her potential to read into the situations. Similarly Pratulchandra Gupto wrote *Thakumar Goyendagiri* where the recently widowed Thakuma uses her sagacity to locate the murderer of Thakurda, her husband (Ghosh 69). Both these women, are aged and are engaged in an amateurish act of detection, not in an effort to provide an expert solution to a problem that is wholly external to them, but sort out problems they are personally inflicted by or are curiously interested about. Their mobility is restricted and so is the scope for adventure of venturing into unknown territories as they operate in familiar grounds- the neighbourhood or family. They cannot be considered as a removed observer always, as they possess a holistic and subjective knowledge of their surroundings, where their minute observations of the idiosyncrasies of the members involved allow them to notice deviations and evaluate them using common sense. Their expertise is not sought by any legal authority, and they do whatever they do by volition alone. These elderly women can very easily be kept within the prescriptive norms of acceptable womanhood, thus appealing to the readers’ sense of humour and curiosity, while also conforming to the idea of desexed women with brains. They are definitely

indigenized inkeeping with the popular frame of reference intact so that the audience can accept them easily. But by no means can they be considered as challenging the strong edifice already built by the male detectives, so that the imagination of the character of the detective could be extended to include women as well.

### 2.7. On her detective trail

Ashapurna Debi in her sole woman detective story registered a scathing criticism against the gendered bias of the genre of detective fictions. Suggestively titling her story as “Golpoi ki Olpo”<sup>xxxix</sup> (c. 1994), she narrates a true story of a servant-girl, Kajol Mandal, and how her potential as a detective allows her to solve a case of murder in the neighbourhood. Ashapurna opposes the prejudice that women have lesser reasoning and logical capabilities and so, cannot be detectives. While regretting the fact that there are fewer tales of women detectives, she states that women possess ‘*shohojato khomota*’, an innate power, of detecting disorder and crime, and are also more curious than men to look for the source of disruption. This is so because women are continuously confronted by various challenges in their normal, everyday living which they must overcome (Ashapurna199). She criticizes the patriarchal idea of considering the phrase ‘woman detective’ with hilarity, and launches a scornful attack on male writers of the genre who unabashedly borrow plots and characters from a woman writer, thus a woman’s brainwork, (Agatha Christie) and claim originality, when what they are doing is mere translation (ibid: 199).

Thus, while the corpus of Indian detective fictions borrowed freely from the established English canon, it seemed almost impossible to imagine a professional woman detective with a sense of independence like Loveday Brooke in Indian detective fictions as it emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Why didn’t a tale like Loveday’s also travel to India and get translated? Does that mean Indian women were in any way less aware of their capabilities and rights than European women? By the middle of the nineteenth century women’s education had begun in India; by the end of the nineteenth century, Rukhmabai dissolved her marriage and went aboard to study medicine; several women’s magazines brought in the new phenomenon of women writers who strongly influenced public opinion. Then why was it impossible to think of a woman detective until the middle of twentieth century? The answer might not be very simple; but one aspect may lucidly evolve from here:

although women were fighting for rights and freedom all over the world, 'woman' cannot be a culturally coherent category, but form a historical and political category where women's struggles against patriarchies are varied. Again, just as there are multiple patriarchies, there must be multiple ways of gaining empowerment and multiple forms of empowerment.

The nationalist project would not allow adoption/adeption to western values to chart the contours of indigenous lives. Detective fiction had already established itself as a class conscious genre where it catered to an urban, middle class, *bhadralok* sensibility. Such class consciousness would not bear digression from norms. Thus crime narratives constantly maneuvered themselves to suit the demands of the *bhadralok*. As such the titillating sexual content, or the presentation of gruesome crimes, and tabooed subjects was subtly presented within a moral and ethical mold that judged transgressive women, while making a hero of the male detective. Insistent masculinity of the detective became the most important ingredient of the fictions, which made it impossible for women to enter the genre except on the terms laid down by the conservativeness of the genre itself. Moreover the popular structure of the genre, its character of being a mass genre, might have further disallowed scope for expanding the genre's conventions for experimentation. Detective fictions rather served as a check on the mounting aspirations of the 'new woman' because, being the subject of reform, she was being equipped to comprehend liberty, equality in her own terms. However, what was served to her was censured liberality that was consistent with the nationalist agenda. She could, therefore, receive education, but could not be engaged in work outside her domestic space. Her movement into the public sphere was constrained to the extent that in her public appearance she had to be desexed to live upto the image of a *bhadramohila*, or even the nation. It, therefore, became imperative for the *bhadramohila* to keep herself within the laid down pattern of norms, or else she would be marked as transgressive woman whom the society could easily and eagerly dispose with. Thus, although it was imagination which created the detective in the first place, and also molded his appearance in accordance to the need of the context, the imagination could not topple prejudices directed against the emancipation of Indian women, and find expression in something as revolutionary as the woman detective during this time when detective fictions proliferated in leaps and bounds. This is so because such a characterization would completely expunge the contrived Indianness of

the Indian woman that the rhetoric of nationalism was so cautiously building. Hence neither the urban, middle class educated *bhadramohila* reader nor the writer could venture into this uncensored form of popular literature to give vent to their expressions of freedom, except in cases where such risks were minimal (like women writers creating male detectives).

The Indian market of the popular, which basically was derided as lowly *battala* literature, saw a veritable exclusion of anything that could challenge the monolithic ideals of the *bhadralok*; the *bhadramohila* writer could not easily venture to create a woman detective who must occupy the public space as the form of the genre had already laid down. Hence, just as women wrote from within the confines of domesticity, giving visibility to the complexities interred in non-issues and women's lives, the detectives as old women, restricted within domestic confines, also seemed to serve the purpose of coalescing domestic experiences and detective adventures.

The detective by 1920s had become a professional detective, unlike the consulting or amateur detective of the British corpus, except the women detectives in the British canon who were mostly professionals, either associated with the police or with detective agencies. The urban middle class Bengali sought redemption from their downtrodden condition during the colonial times by engaging in the service sector, a development that owed to the rapid shift from agrarian to industrial economy. Professional women in reality had already emerged by 1895 when thirty four women had graduated from Calcutta Medical College of which twenty-one were employed in Dufferin hospitals, and some were practising privately. Needless to say, that though such mobilisation of women into professional public arenas faced ardent criticism, medical professions were among the first professions that were opened up for women. However, women were still treated as lesser than their male counterparts. Their knowledge was restricted to those aspects of medical science that were related to mostly to women; their degrees and payments were lesser and “they never practised medicine outside of male control” (Forbes 119). However, the reform movements directed towards women had no intention of incorporating them into the expanding service sector, as the reforms were themselves based on the strict division between material/spiritual, public/private domains and strictly marked spaces for men and women. In such a scenario the professional woman detective, like her male

counterparts in Byomkesh, also seemed quite an improbability. How, then, was it possible to imagine the middle class urban woman detective in around 1950s?

It seems that the stringent divisions on which the nationalist movement was actually founded could not ultimately hold its sway. Backed by educational reforms, proliferations of printing presses, coming up of magazines, and associations of and by women, women ultimately were able to extend the boundaries of their imagination, which spoke of a worldview that Indian women were developing through the changing socio-political conditions of the period. Constrained by patriarchy, women moved on to building their sense of autonomy and freedom bridge by bridge. While education stimulated their imagination and allowed them to voice forth their concerns, it also whetted their consciousness of freedom and enhancement to extend to territories which were erstwhile restricted to them. While such consciousness enthused them to claim and occupy public spheres, mostly by writing on domestic issues from within the private domains, it also encouraged them to inhabit spaces which were considered strictly male domains- one such sphere being writing, and another could be male dominated works. This transition came after prolonged struggle. It is interesting to note after Jayeeta Bagchi<sup>xxxii</sup> that just when it was thought that women's question had been resolved by the nationalist movement, it was actually just being posed by women in around 1920s (76). Moreover, the question was no longer about women alone but had been sensitised to open up questions pertaining to gender. It was such a turn that allowed women to negotiate new possibilities, question dominant discourses, oppose patriarchal ideas and try to resist co-option by patriarchal strategies. It is through such avenue that the possibilities of a woman detective in fictions must have emerged. Moreover, by 1920s-30s detectives stories like those featuring Byomkesh had consolidated the *bhadralok* image of the detective which also found a considerable amount of readership, although with a lot of censure.

The coming up of the woman writer and her relentless attack directed against the citadel of patriarchy allowed her to challenge representations of women. However, it must be noted that it is through contingent moments of emancipation, the continuous movement back and forth, that the woman writers negotiated terms with patriarchy in order to draw the contours of woman subjectivity within contexts as varied as ours. Woman subjectivity, which is not a monolith, cannot be understood by divesting it

from the socio-cultural and political context in which it is embedded. Thus what becomes a matter of importance is to understand this need for contextualising women's subjectivities, especially in an Indian context. This would allow comprehension of the evolving women subjectivities by analysing them vis-à-vis the socio-political movements related to nation building processes and women's movements which build up simultaneously. An analysis as such would help in the understanding of the ideas that could ultimately frame the woman detective in Bengali fictions in around 1950s. The negotiations which such a creation had to undergo might open up comprehension of the ideological position of women detective in the later fictions of the twenty first century.

## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup>Charles. J. Rzepka. "Introduction." *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, edited by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horseley, Wiley Blackwell, 2010. pp. 1-10.

<sup>ii</sup>Stephen Knight. *Crime Fiction, 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

<sup>iii</sup>Ian A. Bell. "Eighteenth- century crime writing." *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, edited by Martin Priestman, Cambridge University Press, 2003. pp. 7- 17.

<sup>iv</sup>Lyn Pykett. "The Newgate novel and sensation fiction, 1830-1868." *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, edited by Martin Priestman, Cambridge University Press, 2003. pp. 19- 40.

<sup>v</sup>ibid:

<sup>vi</sup>Realistic police narratives include Eugene Francois Vidocq's *Memoires* published in France in 1828; fictional account of the activities of Bow Street Runners in Richmond: Scenes from *The Life of a Bow Street Runner* (1827) which went to inspire other detective stories before Poe's detective was formally launched. Voltaire's *Zadig* and Sophocles' *Oedipus* have also contended as inspiration for the detective figure (Knight, *Detection*, 24-26).

<sup>vii</sup>Eva Burke. "Exploring the Shifting Dynamics of Female Victimhood and Vocality in Poe and Pirakis." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 17, no.2, 2016. p. 43-53.

<sup>viii</sup>Andrew Forrester. *The Female Detective*. London. 1864.

<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.41753/page/n3/mode/2up>. Accessed on 20 Oct 2018.

<sup>ix</sup>Stephan Hayward. *Revelations of a Lady Detective*. London. 1864.

<sup>xx</sup>Sally R. Munt. *Murder by the Book?: Feminism and the Crime Novel*, Routledge, 1994.

<sup>xi</sup>Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism*, Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000.

<sup>xii</sup>Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham. "Introduction." *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, feminism and international consumer culture, 1880-1930*, edited by Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham, Routledge, 2004. pp 1-14.

<sup>xiii</sup>Adrienne E. Gavin and Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton. "'She would write...in invisible ink': An Introduction." *Writing Women of the Fin de Siecle: Authors of Change*, edited by Adrienne E. Gavin and Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. pp. 1-12.

<sup>xiv</sup> Lynn Pickett, *The 'Improper Feminine': The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*, Routledge, 1992: 2004.

<sup>xv</sup> Adrienne Gavin. "C.L. Pirkis (not "Miss")": Public Women, Private Lives, and The Experiences." *Writing Women of the Fin de Siecle: Authors of Change*, edited by Adrienne E. Gavin and Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. pp. 137- 150.

<sup>xvi</sup> From February to July, 1894, six short stories featuring the detective was published in *The Ludgate Monthly* issues, while seventh story was added to the *The Ludgate Illustrated Magazine* in 1894, and then, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*, a collection of all the seven stories was published by Hutchinson and Co. in March, 1894.

<sup>xvii</sup> Catherine Louisa Pirkis. "The Black Bag Left On A Door-Step" *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*, Hutchinson Co, 1894. [digital.library.upenn.edu/women/pirkis/brooke/brooke.html#I](http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/pirkis/brooke/brooke.html#I). Accessed on 28 Aug 2017.

<sup>xviii</sup> Catherine Louisa Pirkis. "The Red-Hill Sisterhood" *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*, Hutchinson Co, 1894. [digital.library.upenn.edu/women/pirkis/brooke/brooke.html#I](http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/pirkis/brooke/brooke.html#I). Accessed on 28 Aug 2017.

<sup>xix</sup> Francesca Orsini. "Detective Novels: A Commercial Genre in Nineteenth-century North India." *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century* edited by Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia. Permanent Black, 2004. pp.435-482.

<sup>xx</sup> Arindam Dasgupta. 'Introduction'. *Sekaler Goyenda Kahini: Collection of Novels*, Vol. 1 &2 edited by Arindam Dasgupta, Ananda Publishers, 2017. [Translations are mine].

<sup>xxi</sup> Shampa Roy. *Gender and Criminality in Bangla Crime Narratives: Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

<sup>xxii</sup> A veritable explosion of independent presses set up by Bengali printers in an area in north Calcutta known as *battala* (the banyan tree quarter) could be seen from 1820s to 1860s in Calcutta which had evolved into a huge market for cheap printing and publishing, where a range of texts from different genres were published, including crime genre. Although this huge industry had been looked upon with disdain in the context of hierarchized literatures, *battala* has been considered as the nursery in which Bangla books found nourishment and grew. However, literatures which came out of *battala* presses acquired enough wry of the *bhadralok* readers, who were the emergent upper and middle class Indians, educated in colonial sensibilities and highly class conscious. As such seriousness was an epithet never attached to such literature, which also kept it somewhat removed from the mainstream. However, *battala* presses catered to a huge variety of readers; their publications ranging from chap books to *paanchalis* to *panjikas*, besides producing other genres of literatures, thus contributing to the mass cultural genre system (Roy 57).

<sup>xxiii</sup> Sumanta Banerjee. "Marginalisation of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal." *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, Zubaan, 1989. pp. 166- 234.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Bamabodhini Patrika* was a monthly Bengali journal, the first of its kind in the country, edited by Umeshchandra Dutta from 1863. He along with some other young Brahmo activists established the Bamabodhini Sabha in 1863 from where the journal emanated. Its declared aim was to educate Bengali housewives and to publish suitable books and journals for them. Bringing into its fold both liberal and conservative voices, *Bamabodhini* played a significant role in the changing dimension of women's life in colonial Bengal. The journal continued up to 1922.

<sup>xxv</sup> Tanika Sarkar. "Introduction." *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black. 2000. pp. 2-20.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Partha Chatterjee. "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, Zubaan, 1989. pp. 306- 333.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Saradindu Bandhopadhyay. "Arthamanartham" *Byomkesh Samagra*, Ananda Publishers, 2007, pp. 102- 127. [Translations are mine].

<sup>xxviii</sup> Geraldine Forbes. *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Politics, Medicine, and Historiography*, Chronicle Books, 2005.

<sup>xxix</sup> Nirmalya Ghosh. "Goyendanir Shatkahan" in *Bangla Goyenda Sahitya Sankha*, edited by Tapash Bhaumik, *Korok Sahitya Patrika*, 2017, pp. 67-79. [Translations are mine].



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<sup>xxx</sup>Sourindramohan Mukhopadhyay. “Bindi Pishir Goyendagiri” in Nirendranath Chakraborty edited *Meyera Jokhon Goyenda*. New Script. 2019. pp. 1-13.

<sup>xxxi</sup>Ashapoorna Debi. “Meye Goyendar Bahaduri” in *Ashapoorna Debi-r Shukhtara-r Shera Golpo*. Deb Sahitya Kutir. 1994:2016. pp. 198-229.[Translations are mine].

<sup>xxxii</sup>Jayeeta Bagchi. “Education and Gender in Nineteenth-Century Bengal: An Overview.” *Shaping the Discourse: Women’s Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi, Stree, 2014.pp. lix-lxvii.

## Chapter – 3

### **Voices made themselves heard: How the Woman Writer thinks the Woman Detective**

“Being on the fringes of the world is not the best place for someone who intends to recreate it: here again, to go beyond the given, one must be deeply rooted in it”

~Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949:2009)

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The influence of individual, collective or dominant ideologies while working on a critical analysis might be extremely difficult to counter, especially when such ideologies are framed as given ‘truths’, coated with the assumption that there could be no ‘truth’ beyond it. Often, the path thus laid down might try to look for truths and also arrive at it, without knowing that what has been achieved is only a semblance of truth, often being a repetition of that which is already there. Although literature is not encumbered with the presentation of truth as might be expected from history or sociology, there might be less scope to deny that the lens of literature, which it uses to reflect on life and also mould the values and aesthetics of its readers, is considerably influenced by the ideologies which shape the author, who is never insulated from the social, political and cultural influences of the time. As such literary analysis of the work of women writers lead to the negotiation with contexts, and concerns which try to identify women’s story as it runs in the background of the text. It might create avenues for new forms of sociological enquiry pertaining to the social background, political conditions, economic status of women of the times, its changing dimensions and its impact on the existing literary scene as it is brought to bear upon the text. This examination is bound to present us with certain truths, but whether such truths reveal something new, or remain coloured by that which is already available, again opens the matter for further scrutiny, and also for refurbishing the tools of examination.

Enough ambivalence surrounds the term ‘feminist’ which, however, constantly finds fresh purpose as one looks into the crevices of ambivalence to discover new continents of meaning. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers<sup>1</sup> relate this ambiguity to a curious

case of amnesia that seems to pervade women within and without academy, which turns out to be the resultant effect of the tension in contemporary criticism between the power of feminism and its increasing spectrality (1). They deride, what is marked as post-feminist history, where the need to challenge patriarchal power, or to analyse complexities of gendered subjectivities seem to have lost its relevance, as if to indicate that the material reality of text formation has altered. But what remains in practice still, has been there since the time of inception of feminist criticism which has always tried to analyse ideas that impact and emanate from divergent coordinates and uphold the significance and the politics of those ideas in shaping and disseminating the text while also laying down the necessary tools for comprehending the impact of such a vibrant analytical apparatus. Feminist literary criticism is often said to acquire its separate status from feminist political activism by being related to textuality, although there is no denying the fact that the boundaries between literature, politics, activism, academics is difficult to determine because of the fluidity that conjoins all such activities.

Discussions on and about women have varied from being misogynistic, to emancipatory, the speculations excited by the concept of woman in imagination, in reality, engagements surrounding their desires, lives, and reflections, which have been the object of centuries of conscious and unconscious expressions of women's writings about themselves, about other women, about men, their bodies and minds, arts and ideas. Across centuries woman has been the subject of innumerable re-configurations. With every re-inscription comes the necessity for re-reading the different contextual frameworks which are employed to create the women's text which is a site of re-engaging the tools by which newer domains of feminist engagements could be comprehended. It is in the space of the text that the woman can be both defamed and defended; it is also here that she might come up with new comprehension of possibilities of imagining the past, present and future of the female subject.

### **3.2. The relevance of Context in comprehending Women**

The construction of 'third world feminisms', according to Talpade<sup>ii</sup>, must, at first, develop a "critique of hegemonic 'Western' feminisms" and then, formulate feminist concerns and strategies imbricated in the geographical, historical, cultural context in which it is located (174). These two contradictory processes are necessary so that feminist scholarly practices are able to create a political praxis that would counter

and resist “the totalizing imperative of age-old ‘legitimate’ and ‘scientific’ bodies of knowledge” which, being inscribed in relations of power, cannot be considered as apolitical scholarship (ibid: 173). In this respect Talpade asserts that, when a sizable amount of western feminist writings tend to delve into constructing a monolithic notion of cross-cultural patriarchy or male dominance, a reductive and homogenous notion of ‘third world difference’ also evolves as a side effect (ibid:173). This monolithic idea of ‘third world difference’ tends to circulate a stable and a historical notion about the third world “which appropriate(s) and ‘colonize’(s) the constitutive complexities which characterize the lives of women in these countries” (ibid: 174), creating a homogenous notion of women in the third world which is pitted against another homogenous notion of women in the first world. As English still retains its position as the most widely circulated language, and the political economies of publication and circulation has made Western feminist critical understanding readily available elsewhere, it becomes imperative to delve into the intricacies of such formulations which has effects and implications that often go beyond immediate feminist and disciplinary audience, sometimes to create profound effect in the lives of women in all countries.

Talpade Mohanty, thus, draws attention to the “strategic location of the category ‘women’<sup>iii</sup> vis-à-vis the context of analysis” (ibid:175). The moment women are assumed to be “always already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions” (ibid:176), there evolves a stable category of analysis which assumes an a historical, universal unity between women based on certain such universal categories like subordination. What becomes problematic, as such, is the denial of material and ideological specificities that could constitute attributes for a particular group of women in a particular context (ibid:177), and also the probability of finding specificities within the group itself, as commonalities are mostly arbitrarily thrown as category. Again, when women are seen as a coherent group across contexts, the world gets structured into “binary, dichotomous terms, where women are always seen in opposition to men”, patriarchy is always about male dominance, and systems and institutions are constructed by men (ibid: 179). Thus, considering women as archetypal victims and men as perpetrators actually freezes men and women into two predetermined categories- the powerful and powerless respectively – without allowing any theorizing and interpretation that can be forged by a historical and political practice and analysis (ibid:176). Moreover, if

struggle for a just society implies moving from a powerless position to a powerful position for women as a group, then the new society, which is anticipated, must replicate the existing organization of power relations, because what it constitutes is just an inversion of power. This binary division of power also implies that only if women are able to access power, the existing organization of relations will be dismantled and the problem solved (ibid: 189). Correlating results to such easy calculations are non-existent. As such instead of trying to fathom how her activities acquire meanings through concrete social interactions, Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar point out, “Feminist theories which examine our cultural practices as ‘feudal residues’ or label us ‘traditional’, also portray us as politically immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of Western feminism. They need to be continuously challenged...” (qtd. in Talpade, 177).

Hence instead of advocating the creation of a particular group of women as norm or referent, what emerges as a need is to “understand the contradictions inherent in women’s location within various structures” through which effective political action and challenges can be devised (Talpade 185). Not only does such an approach disallow reductive generalisations, it allows meanings and explanations to rise from socio-historical contexts. Women cannot be defined as subjects existing outside social and political relations, but must be seen as ones who are constructed and in turn construct the intricacies of these social relations. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid<sup>iv</sup> also voice the same concern when they assert that, “A feminist historiography rethinks historiography as a whole and discards the idea of women as something to be *framed* by a context, in order to be able to think of gender difference as both structuring and structured by the wide set of social relations”(3). Hence, a lot of questions arise regarding the nature of social and cultural processes within which civil society determines the working of patriarchies in the daily lives of women. As such it becomes imperative to press the boundaries of established disciplines and knowledge systems and work at the interface of various disciplines to comprehend this process of social working and reworking.

With the need to contextualise social interactions which would endow meanings to the ways women negotiate within a socio-historical context, this chapter intends to focus on women’s writings from the colonial period to the present to try and understand

how woman subjectivity evolved from within a variety of socio-historical moments which were definitely political, and which often existed either simultaneously or overlaid on top of one another. Such an undertaking might open up avenues to comprehending the whys and hows of the creation of a woman detective in Indian women's writings from post-independence period, when a woman detective was, for the first time, serialised by Dev Sahitya Kutir, to the present times, when there exists a variety of such representations which mostly adhere to market demands of creating titillating woman sleuths, with some deviations, of course. The word 'evolution', despite its positivist sense, should not be taken as a radical march forward, but inters within it the contingent moments of emancipation, vis-à-vis the acts of contestation and compliance which must have had a telling effect on how these women subjectivities were formed. With the intention of looking into the contradictions which are inherent in women's location within various structures, this chapter would be a ground work for further analysing categories of violence, nation, family and work, which are considered universal categories of women's oppression having a universal applicability, as these apply to Indian women detective fictions. However, locating these categories within specific socio-historical and political contexts might bring out the nuances in the way these categories might communicate anew. It is only by allowing enough space to understanding reconstitution of the various forms of patriarchies through a period that the present complexities might unfold themselves. However, since no work on such an issue as the changing position of women in its social, cultural and political specificity can even hope to be representative, this research as a whole, and this chapter, in particular, will confine its scope within the urban, middle class women subjectivities, just as how the women detectives used here for illustrations are created.

### 3.3. Contextualising Indian women's writings

Analysing certain strands of western feminist literary criticism<sup>v</sup>, which have been projected as having universal applicability, Tharu and Lalita<sup>vi</sup> try to delve into the multiple points of emergence, convergence and divergence that exemplifies the strands of Indian feminist criticism where plurality cannot just be part of a design, but must also form part of practical applicability. They intensely oppose the way these critical strands try to uncover the complexities and depths of women's writings which tend to naturalize and even universalise female literary creativity in the high subjectivist ethic

of nineteenth century Europe (ibid: 21). Tharu and Lalita opine: “History and geography can only touch their [Gilbert and Gubar’s] schemes tangentially as incident or as locale. Patriarchal ideology seems to bear no relation to class, race, empire and once it enters the literary text, it has a life entirely independent of its counterpart in the world” (ibid:21).

Hence finding it imperative to negotiate their difference of stand from such inherently imperialist designs of western feminist criticism, Tharu and Lalita bring up four major ideas as put forward by the western literary trend, mostly from the feminist contentions of Showalter and Gilbert and Gubar, and analyse its usability as a method in Indian feminist literary criticism. Of these four major ideas, firstly, they try to delve into the western preoccupation with the idea of loss; secondly, they examine the idea of release or escape as it is dealt with in the western trend; thirdly, they analyse the problem that arises as the concept of experience becomes vital to women’s writings, and fourthly, they try to deal with the hidden politics of what some strands of Western feminism have set up as women’s real experiences, or female nature itself (ibid:22).

Explicating the idea of loss, Tharu and Lalita point out that ‘loss’ is always measured against an established norm, as if it is the scattered fragment of a larger dream. Hence such an idea inevitably privileges certain kinds of writings and writers (mostly male and few women), charging them “with the task of providing post-Enlightenment Western society in general, and the nation in particular, with its ethical capital” (ibid:24). However, they fail to question the literary sanctum that is thus created which allows selective entry of writers who perform the task of writing in keeping with the ideals of the sanctum, thereby, closing down multiple points of creativity through the politics of sanction. Such a notion can be devastating when one tries to critique women’s writings in the Indian context where not only are there multiple points of emergence, but also divergences in the way the writer uses the agency of her writing self which might not subscribe to the logic of phases of women’s writings.

The idea of release, as projected through Gilbert and Gubar’s criticism, asserts the presence of a repressed female creativity which is struggling for a vent. This struggle is recognised by the female critic, and then, restored to recognition through her reading to a female literary tradition that renders the present day female consciousness

of the author somehow naturalised and enshrined as female nature itself (24). Therefore, what the critic is exactly doing is making all women's writing fit into the frame of a precise mode of feminism which the authors themselves understand and experience as feminism. When through this idea of feminism the European middle class woman acquires the status of being the metaphor for all women, other times and other places remain as mere dispersal, and cannot gather the significance of being transformative. Release, then follows a singular meaning making process where it must challenge a monolithic idea of patriarchy, and also challenge it in accepted ways of feminism. While class, race, caste, differences play no role in defining such a release, the female self becomes fixed, unchanging, a historical, something which barely befits the Indian traditions of women's writings.

The idea of women's writing as a documentation of women's experience emanates from the notion of the literary text as an embodiment of the author's experience which would go on to speak the truth about his or her world of which she would be representative. Thus when experience became an empiricist data and critical discussions conflated themselves with the empiricist idea that experience was true knowledge, experience lost the critical edge it had acquired as a political tool, by assuming both representative status and also, thereby, becoming unchanging for a group. Liberal feminists endorsed what they considered as authentic form of female experience which tended to become universal. Tharu and Lalita opine that, while western feminism relied on their own social contradictions to understand the strands of feminism, the other contradictions historically constituted by colonialism, race, class, caste, which defined the 'other' subjectivities and self were not simply addressed.

While discussing the covert politics of these literary trends to comprehend the female self, Tharu and Lalita point out that, what was, thus, defined as gender subordination by western feminists did not really accommodate other histories that could have shaped the contours of power or desire differently. Women concerns furtively glossed over the concerns related to the oppression of class, imperialism, race. Plurality did not embody multiple points of emergence, divergence and convergence which could, in turn, inform the complexities in such moments. The realism that they posed was a particular social realism which tried to usurp realities universally. Feminism drew attention to the spectacular ways in which subtle strategies of power



were written into the shaping and differentiating of the feminine in the everyday practices of family, of education, of the workplace, law. But feminisms that evolved as a result of this deconstructive move as true or natural, or as essentially female, projected themselves as addressing only particular concerns evolving out of a particular society, and considering it universal. Patriarchal ideologies were considered as unchanging, only a diversification to what they considered as patriarchy. Such feminism aligned itself with the splendour of power, thus making it imperialist.

In their intention of transforming the monumental institution of women's writing, Tharu and Lalita maintain, much like Talpade and Sangari and Vaid, that writers are imbricated in the ideologies of their times. In a similar vein, patriarchies also take shape and are transformed within specific historical circumstances which make it necessary to read women's literature in the light of how it implicates its sense of space and time. According to them, women writers respond to and experience their ideologies from complexly constituted decentred positions within them because familial ideologies clearly constitute male and female subjectivities differently, as do ideologies of nation or Empire. Ideologies are also not contested in the same fashion. When these ideologies are experienced, analysed and understood differently, they must result in the creation of different subjects, even among women themselves, because women cannot be understood as simply a cultural construct, but are also an experiential reality. Thus, women writers may be read for the gestures of defiance or subversion implicit in them. But there must also be readings that does not lessen discontinuities, dispossession, or marginality but dramatizes or clarifies it. Tharu and Lalita express the need to undo the strict distinction between literary and social text, to reach beyond academia and literature. Women's writings can be read as documents that state what is at stake in the embattled practices of self and agency, at the margins of patriarchies reconstituted by the emerging bourgeoisie of empire and nation. Thus, Tharu and Lalita posit a new form of critical enquiry into women's writings in India where by looking into the past struggles of women's writing, we might be able to comprehend what we inherited. This chapter intends to do exactly that. It is inclined to comprehend the evolution of middle class urban women subjectivities by investigating the resistances that women's writings intended to build against the monolithic idea of Indian women, as represented by the category of the *bhadramohila*, during the anti-colonial movement and also after independence when women's movements had a more organised character

and tried to influence change through various modes like institutionalising the agenda for women through women's studies programmes. It is significant for the research to point out that while it considers discontinuities with reference to time frame, the continuities are adjudged by the ways ideas travelled across time, sometimes unchanged, sometimes reformulated. This investigation would bear upon the idea of the women detectives fictionalised across space and time as seen through the politics of a gendered space constituted by the notions of violence, nation, family and work.

### 3.4 Women's writings in India: Issues and outlets

Tharu and Lalita in their "Introduction" to the unparalleled volumes of *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present* (1991:1993) recalled the furore around the 1910 version of *Radhika Santwanam*<sup>vii</sup>, written by the eighteenth-century Telegu poet Muddupalani and reprinted by Bangalore Nagaratnamma, which led to the banning of the text by the British government on the pretext "that the book would endanger the moral health of their Indian subjects" (Tharu & Lalita, vol.1, 4) clearly indicates towards a specific idea of 'Indian subjects' that the colonial government propagated and wished to retain. When Nagaratnamma's publishers were charged with the publication of a number of obscene books, *Radhika Santwanam* being the most 'objectionable' one (ibid: 4), it also points at a historically constructed idea of Indians that the colonial government did not intend to breach. However, in collusion with the colonial government were reformers like Kandukuri Veereshalingam, father of social reform movement in Andhra Pradesh, who dismissed the book as something "which should never be heard by a woman, let alone emerge from a woman's mouth" (qtd. in Tharu & Lalita 3), thus also pointing towards a certain idea of Indian woman which was considered as has been handed down by traditions of ancient cultures, which were taken as monolithic. Amidst the furore, was the fierce voice of Nagaratnamma, who being "a patron of the arts, a learned woman, a musician, and a distinguished courtesan" (ibid: 3), confidently defended *Radhika Santwanam* as a well-formed work of art in *rasa* which had a perfect but rare balance: "it was filled- to the brim- but not spilling over" (ibid: 2). She was not ready to accept the limitations being posed on women's imagination as, she wrote, modesty could not be considered as coming naturally to women only (ibid:3). There were academicians who spoke against the highly expurgated versions of the work and did not consider it jarring upon Indian

feelings or sentiments (ibid: 5). Despite all this the book was repeatedly banned, published and circulated secretly for a few years, and after Independence, when the ban was finally lifted in 1947, the book slowly withered away from the literary consciousness of the nation as a disposable piece of art, an inevitable fate of innumerable women writers and women's writings that did not and could not fit in. While opposing trends in criticism did exist all the time, it seems that the crucible of 'nation' as constructed by the colonial government, by the reformists and nationalists, by the independent government later on made it difficult to contain plurality and fostered a monolithic idea of Indian women, especially the reading and writing Indian woman. However, divergences and convergences existed within the same frame, often reconstituting the idea of subjectivity. These ideas propagated themselves through many vehicles, women's writings being the most prominent and the most dramatic.

#### 3.4.1. Ideas which affected women's writings in India

Patriarchy is not an isolatable system responsible for the subordination of women. Rather patriarchy is a system that is structured by historical processes and other dominant ideologies like race, class, caste, colonialism, which it, in turn, structures. While debating society and women, returning to ancient India in search for both the roots and solution for the associated complexities has been a recurrent act for thinkers. The idea of Indian women has always been tied to ancient India which coloured the notions in the nineteenth century and also continues to do so till the present day. It is this idea, propagated through literature, and the politics of dissemination of it that has shaped every debate on women- their status in Indian society, their role in the family and the nation, their education, sexuality, freedom and the debates over women's subjecthood as it developed in women's writing of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Saidian theory of orientalism proposes that orientalism is a way of coming to terms with the Orient by subscribing to the Orient's special place in western experience as its cultural contestant, or other, thereby evoking the persistent themes and tropes which would contain and represent the Orient through the dominating occidental frameworks (Tharu & Lalita<sup>viii</sup>, Vol.1 43). Thus when the idea of India was built by Europeans like William Jones (1746-1794), the structure became influenced by the interests of the company. While Indologists developed a thesis of a common Indo-

European heritage based on similarities between Sanskrit, the language associated with the Aryans, and classical European languages like Latin, they sought to create the differences too, from the non-Dravidian or semitic languages. Rig Veda was considered as the guardian and witness to India's past cultural heritage which stood in opposition to the materialistic and self-indulgent European societies since it was concluded that the governing principle of the Vedic society was passive, meditative and reflective. Thus ancient India became a sort of utopia for the Romantic imagination with its idyllic, unchanging conditions that allowed the breeding and sustenance of natural human qualities (ibid: 47). Women in ancient India were also characterized by spiritual and ascetic tenderness, complete negation of self-interest and unlimited devotion to family. The degeneration of Vedic culture was attributed to its absorption of elements from other indigenous non-Vedic, non-Aryan traditions, which ultimately culminated in its precipitous fall during the medieval period- the period of the Muslim rule. It was a call for going back to the ethos and practices of ancient civilization to uphold the India that was lost in the intervening years which formed the motive of the reformers, colonisers, nationalists alike, each one trying to fit his own agenda into the idea (ibid: 43).

While this idea of a utopian India with a glorious past in the Vedic era was structuring the subject of India for the colonial masters, it became equally important to create an idea of India which would necessitate the domination of it by the colonial power. Mill's *The History of British India* (1817) and Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* (1927) made the incapability of Indians to rule themselves quite conspicuous. While Mill forwarded the idea of an unchanging Indian culture which was considered as primitive, immoral, rude and fundamentally lacking in presiding over the progress of civil society, it was the atrocious ways in which women were treated in the country, Mill substantiated, that made it desperately in need for a reasonable, moral authoritarian rule. While his mesh of narrative underwrote the reality of the place, and posed India as strange, irrational, the soundness and authority of his observation remained indisputable even for the later nationalists who forced open the question of historiographical biases and exposed the imperialist interests that underwrote such versions (Tharu & Lalita, Vol.1, 42-55). They fought their battles on the logic laid down by the powers they had set out to oppose and tried to create regimes of thinking to contradict the notion, instead of looking into the problem with bare critical

interventions. As such the 'woman's question' remained fixed as one patriarchy confronted another. As 'India' was being usurped by the narratives generated by the power systems, it obscured and delegitimized all other political, cultural and literary changes as minor. The 'woman's question' gained legitimacy only in the way it could facilitate the grand narrative of nation building for both the colonial rulers and the nationalists. This obscured and subordinated the moments of contention and conflict, conferring the question with a fixed identity, like that of Indian past.

Thus, Indian history, in a similar way, continued to remain the history of the Aryan man, the Indo-Gangetic plain, while the Aryan woman- educated, highly spiritual, consciously literary- became his perfect adjunct. While her moral quality and her erudition were stressed, what remained invisible was her rebellion. Similarly invisible from the Indian past were the powerful, historical movements which questioned Aryan dominance, the various strains of secular literature of the period, which has evidence of pre-Aryan existence, were subsumed into the patriarchal framework of the Aryan civilization. It is interesting to note that the female principle of '*prakriti*', which existed in non-Aryan societies, was a vigorous, aggressive and dangerous force that was displaced and overlaid by the patriarchal Aryan society which promoted a staunch homogeneity (Tharu & Lalita, vol.1, 62). This could also be seen in the promotion of Sanskrit, the language of the higher caste, as the official language of the Aryan society which delegitimized local languages of lower castes like Prakrit, which in turn obscured veritable scholars writing in such languages, many of whom were women (ibid: 62). In fact, women artists, poets and singers could also be seen charting the contours of movements like the Bhakti movement, which was a movement against the domination of the upper caste, thus bringing out the realities of the everyday lives of their hearths. Through the poetry of Bhakti movement, women's poetry moved out of the court, the temple, family into the open spaces of the field, the work place and the common women's hearth indicating women's solidarities that existed beyond stringent divisions of society. There was sense of individualism in them which allowed them to move towards a life of liberated faith. Great number of women's writing from the period radically questioned the patriarchal power, thus, showing how women's lives had been changed by this sense of liberation.

However, as the nationalist movement started assimilating itself around the values of the past and was recast by a populist patriarchal imagination, these rebellious, individualistic women were cast off strategically to create a homogenous image of the Indian woman, thus stunting the plurality of voices and also creating a vacuity of the woman's voice. However, this seems to be a subscription to the strategist agenda of the colonial masters in creating a governable India. Reformists and nationalists were wary of anything new, and modernity in lifestyle was seen with a lot of skepticism, although, ironically, both 'new' and 'change' were also the two catchwords of the period. What becomes significant here is to note how women's writings dealt with the constant complexities evolving out of the past impinging upon the present and therefore, reframing modernity, across time.

#### 3.4.2. Dealing with 'new'-ness and change: Shifting modernities

In his essay 'Our Modernity' (1997), Partha Chatterjee<sup>ix</sup>, while evaluating the prefix 'our', as opposed to 'other' modernities which might exist, discusses Rajnarayan Basu's '*Se Kalaar Ekal*' (1873) ('Those Days and These Days') in which Basu differentiates 'these' from 'those' days by the demarcation "the period before and after the full-fledged introduction of English education in India" (Chatterjee 4). Chatterjee explains that in this world of western education and thought that, thus, evolved, all was considered to be '*nabya*' or 'new', while '*adhunik*' or 'modern', as we know it today, had still not made its way into the imagination of the generation, let alone the vocabulary. Hence, 'new' inevitably indicated a disruption in the flow of time, a marker, and an event.

Another idea that seemed to occupy a lot of space in nineteenth century discussions is related to the word '*unnati*', English equivalent of which is 'improvement' or 'progress', Chatterjee points out (5). While marking out the areas where there had been improvement or decline by the introduction/disruption caused by the '*nabya*', Basu pays particular attention to health and states that, while in 'those' days men were known for their physical capabilities, 'these' days are characterized by feeble, sickly and short-lived men (ibid: 5). The question that Chatterjee poses here is, how does Basu reach to this conclusion that this new civilization that the British had inaugurated had in turn generated a feeble generation among the *bhadralok*? It is found that Basu considers the uncritical adoption of European ways of 'modern' life, which

were not only at odds with the indigenous conditions but also do not answer the requirements of the Indian way of life, as the most assertive cause for such an outcome. The universal applicability of modernity as emanating out of European Enlightenment ideals seems inapplicable here, therefore. What is nature of universality, then, that the European idea of modernity envisages which brings about the problem of an uncritical adoption of something new?

In trying to fathom how western modernity works, Chatterjee evokes an essay by Immanuel Kant on Enlightenment (1784) (*alokprapti*) (ibid: 9). In this essay, Kant considers that person as enlightened who instead of depending on other's authority, assumes freedom to take responsibility of one's own action (ibid: 9). Does that mean Kant is considering Enlightenment as a phase of knowledge acquiring which is divested from the past and looking forward to a revolutionary future? Chatterjee refers to Foucault's critique of Kant's essay (ibid: 9) where Foucault concludes that for Kant Enlightenment happens through a series of negations: "Enlightenment is an exit, an escape; exit from tutelage, coming out of dependence" (ibid: 10), thereby being concerned with those particular properties of the present that can differentiate it from the past, not as a discontinuity, it seems, but very much through continuity.

However, individual autonomy, freedom of thought and of expression, cannot be arbitrarily used and thus, abused. There should be areas of personal and social living where freedom of thought and expression would prevail, while in other areas the directives or regulations of a regularized authority would have to prevail, as envisioned by the Enlightenment philosophers (ibid: 11). Kant, therefore, proposes the separation of social spheres into two spheres of exercising reason. One is the public sphere, "where matters of general concern are discussed and where reason is not mobilized for the pursuit of an individual interest or for the support of a particular group" (ibid: 11), and the other is the private sphere, "which relates to the pursuit of individual or particular interest" (ibid:11). While in the former, Kant states, freedom of thought and speech is essential, so that when one has proper knowledge regarding a certain thing, one is able to openly argue and express one's opinion, in the latter such freedom is not at all desirable as what one thinks in the private may hardly impinge upon his work, which has a public visibility, and is governed by a legitimate authoritarian body (ibid: 11). Thus it is in the 'public' domain, according to Kant, that one has greater

opportunity of exercising one's individual free will, while, no matter how individualistic one might be, in the 'private' domain one necessarily becomes the cog in the social wheel (ibid: 11-12). This notion of the 'public' and the 'private' did not gain much currency in later discussions when private sphere was always associated with unrestricted freedom whereas public sphere of social relations was associated with limitations.

While it is difficult to agree with Kant when he points at the distinct separation of public and private domains, another aspect of such distinction and such assertion of free will in the public domain is also essential- his promotion of a hierarchised system of knowledge production and dissemination where only experts of their field might be able to speak their opinions aloud in public (ibid: 13). Such a discourse does not acknowledge differential access to knowledge and also projects knowledge as power which can be instrumentalised for purposes of domination. Thus while Kant asserts Enlightenment to be a modernity that could be the answer of universal emancipation, all his ideology could produce is a constricted sense of freedom and use of reason; hence modernity as a European construct needs to be questioned, and refurbished, Chatterjee argues.

Turning to contemplate over the idea of modernity, as we comprehend it, Chatterjee points at an inherent insecurity among the discourses of the colonized, who always look at modernity with certain skepticism and define it in negative terms, just as Basu did. Chatterjee argues that because our modernity has been so entwined with colonialism, it becomes impossible for us to think that we are able to generate the consciousness of modernity on our own, without becoming the consumers of universal modernity. Chatterjee deduces, "...true modernity consists in determining the particular forms of modernity that are suitable in particular circumstance...." (ibid: 8). This idea not only situates the idea of particular modernities, but also marks it as transformative. Hence, Chatterjee tries to direct our attention towards the creation of an idea of modernity that would emerge from particular forms of modernity instead of mere adoption of that which imposes itself as modern.

Modernity, thus, seems to be about a conscious adoption of the 'new' which is in turn adapted to the particular, thus doing away with dependence on the given, which encourages the exercising of freedom of expression. In this respect, Chatterjee also



argues for devising particular ways of exercising reason in the two spheres of public and private, instead of following the delimiting, hierarchized understanding of the spheres as propagated by Kant. Charting the ideas, thus, should help in comprehending continuously redefinition associated with modernity which is bound to emerge from the particular moments of experiences, depending upon how the ‘change’ and the ‘new’ is accommodated in informing the contours of those experiences. Women’s writings have been most instrumental in evaluating how a refurbished understanding of Indian modernity(ies), along with a constant interrogation of the ideologies of history, have been constantly negotiated for accommodating the experiences of women at various points of their evolution from various points of entry.

### 3.5. The nationalist upsurge and women’s writings

Sangari and Vaid analyze, “...the description and management of gender and female sexuality is involved in the maintenance and reproduction of social inequality” (7), thus pointing out to the fact that although patriarchal systems are class differentiated and open to constant and consistent reformulation, “defining gender seems to be crucial to the formulations of classes and dominant ideologies” (ibid: 7). This is so because changes in the social and political scenarios affect men and women differently. But as gender remains most obscured from all discussions, and debates are often wary of following the path of gender distinctions, it becomes impossible to capture the structural importance of gender in social and cultural politics. Hence, this dichotomy between the social and the political confined the scope of women’s history to ideological issues which were to be taken up in the reform movements without investigating the continuously changing dimensions of patriarchy (Tharu & Lalita<sup>x</sup>, vol.1, 151).

In times of hardship, it is always the marginal who are the worst hit. Since women have always been relegated to a position of vulnerability by discourses of power, the change in the economic and industrial scenario of the colonial nation-state slowly made their role in traditional economy redundant and their gains in modern sector almost negligible. As urban economy was hit by modern industrialization, the old urban aristocracy lost power, which in turn led a whole community of women court artists, poets, singers, dancers to displacement (Tharu & Lalita, Vol.1, 148). The empirically practiced techniques of medicine, forestry, agriculture, conservation as well

as songs and storytelling, which women had been practicing through generations, began shriveling up due to lack of use (ibid:149). Restrictions were being imposed on the unregimented and indecorous intercourse between women of all classes. In this way as the idea of *bhadramohila* was being consolidated, the plurality of women voices was being thwarted. Thus while middle class women's writings were gaining cultural legitimacy, many women cultures were being turned into an illegitimate other. These hidden agendas, which were by no means restricted to upper or middle class women, were becoming the agenda of the radical and subversive women's literature of the time which tried to reveal these strategic intentions, thus indicating that while reform movements aimed at casting women anew socially, women were also becoming new political subjects.

Women's writings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in India categorically reveal how the world had changed for them as new demands from the changing times surfaced, new worlds opened up for negotiation, and women had new aspirations for themselves. While their writings seemed to cater to the ideological conflicts of the period, firstly, brought about by the reform movements, and then, by an emerging nationalism, their writings also revealed narrative and figural schemes of conflicting ideologies. Moreover, the complex dimensions by which woman's subjectivity was being sculpted during those times, and the ways in which women negotiated, reassigned, or destabilized these blueprints, also had a bearing on these writings (Tharu & Lalita, Vol.1, 153). As gender had a major role to play in the structuring of a whole range of social institutions and practices, women's writings revealed how they had also been structured by their own historical and political conjectures which constituted their worlds and could not be equated with any historical or primordial notion of women. Hence, women's writings staged the rich drama of change by either holding on to older strains, or by tacit redeployment of dominant discourses or even, by recharging old themes with new meanings, introducing new emphases and orientation. It must, however, be pointed out that trying to locate a transparent logic in their gestures or "an uncontested centrality"(ibid: 157) might be a vain attempt; the struggles and counter-struggles together shaped women subjectivities, and could not be treated as singularly important.

Women's education also transformed women's literatures when there was a gradual breaking out of the moulds as stories found new shape and were being told from new view-points. The concerns for women's education rose following the nineteenth century and did not merely mean the ability to read and write. "Education meant 'the cultivation of understanding, the improvement of the moral sense and of good and correct principle'" (Bagchi<sup>xi</sup>, liv). This idea of education was to become so ingrained within the cultural dynamics of the *bhadralok*, that, in case of women, education not only allowed them to equip themselves with the tool of reading and writing, but also entrusted them with the up keeping of the cultural baggage of being a *bhadramahila*, a class distinct from the rough, uncouth, loud and garish versions of women belonging to the lower status of society. It also was to turn them into compatible companions of the emerging *bhadraloks*. Not aimed at making women economically potent, the aim of such an education was to turn the traditional woman into an accomplished urban and literate woman who would be able to create the much needed balance between the home and the world, the private and the public sphere. While exhibiting cultural refinement, she would also maintain the sanctity of her hearth. Thus even when emancipation of women was being thought of, it was designed with adequate limitations which would not allow women enough freedom to lead their lives on their own terms. Yet, when education brought home the ability to read and write, this turned into a weapon in the hands of women. The new nationalist mood and the self-confidence education inspired were intensely discernible in the many moves women made through their writings. Many of the works of the period reveal an interweaving of nationalist sentiment with a feminism that is more subtle and more creative than that which emerged with the social reform movement.

Women were seen channelizing their potentials towards editing and publishing journals that had surprisingly long runs. Between 1880s and 1920s the movement surrounding 'woman's question' was enthusiastically being carried forward, expanded and transformed by women. As the ideologies of the movement shifted away from the centre of public debate to the less-visible and less-policed peripheries of the inner domains of the private spheres, the issues that these magazines, run by women writers, dealt with became more complex. They spoke about transforming the lives of widows through education, and directing them towards a life of self-reliance and independence. They rallied for the removal of purdah, not because it was a blot on the nation's face,

but so that women could access opportunities and education freely. Women hung on to the notion of freedom and justice and infused them with their aspirations, even as they responded to the call of the nation. In fact some of the forceful objection of women against the atrocities of patriarchal power came from all sections of the society, notwithstanding class and caste barriers, thus giving us an idea of history from a different perspective altogether.

An anonymous essay titled ‘Bangadeshiyo Mahilaganer Swadhinata Bishay’<sup>xii</sup> (‘Bengali Women and the Issue of Freedom’) was published in *Bambodhini Patrika* around mid- May to mid-June, 1871. A majority of the writings of the period, especially by reformists, were dedicated to implanting the sacredness of domesticity in women who were always being encouraged to do the right thing in order to be the ideal Bengali Hindu *ramani*/woman- a monolithic category, indeed! Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay in his famous essay, ‘*Prachina ebong Nabina*’ in *Bangadarshan* in 1874 (Bagchi lviii) pointed out that the work of a ‘new woman’ or *nabina* was to add an aesthetic dimension to the uninspiring daily chores and transform it into a skilled operation. This notion had purchase within the nationalistic project which required women to hold base within the household where they would work towards bringing up better sons for the nation. Their need to access public spaces, which were basically considered male reserves, was thoroughly discouraged owing to male insecurities which would be further threatened by the presence of women. While patriarchy trickled down through both men and women, the 1871 essay authored by an anonymous *bhadramahila* had something different to offer.

This essay, under discussion, had been signed ‘*Ekti Bhadramahila*’ (‘A genteel woman’) a category that spoke of a transition, a change that was underway in the socio-cultural and political atmosphere of colonial Bengal. The essay is an interesting assemblage of propositions on women’s freedom coming out from a *bhadramahila*’s pen who advocates the movement of women out of their confines to explore the world. She admonishes the prejudices that constantly bind women’s mobility, “...the lack of freedom has led to the calamitous condition of the women of Bengal who from their birth till death are reduced to the existence of caged birds and beasts” (trans. 5). Reflecting on the dehumanised condition of women she calls for a marriage between the private and the public world in a woman’s life. She writes, “What can be more

pleasurable to men than to find their educated, liberated wives fulfilling the duty of looking after their families conscientiously and with care, and also being appreciated by people all over the world?’ (ibid: 5). Thus, public presence of a woman can be sanctioned only if the demands and duties of the private sphere are adequately meted with- a call for a balance. This curious amalgamation of the public and private domains again cannot take place without men- the knights in armour, “I had thought that the educated broadminded wise men would dispel the sorrow-filled darkness and free women from bondage...” (ibid: 5). What is significantly showcased here is a sense of transition, which might not confer radical liberation from patriarchies that were practised and internalised, but that which had started questioning it, nevertheless. The movement towards a sense of liberation cannot be linear. Hence, while equal status for women and men is emphasized upon through a cultural revision of the idea of crossing the threshold, the movement of women is not without the baggage laden on women by new formed patriarchies. However, she can cross the threshold; that is a significant idea to reckon with.

Women’s writings wrestled with the restricted image of the ‘new woman’ as a compatible companion for the modern, reformed new men. While one of the major concerns of nineteenth century novelists was to create a ‘new woman’ with whom their progressive heroes could fall in love, Swarnakumari Devi’s *Kahake* (1898) subverts the equation by turning it into the story of a woman’s search for a soul mate. Rashsundari Debi<sup>xiii</sup>, who secretly and fearfully taught herself to read and write, spoke of the norm by refuting it, not only in her writings but by the very activity of writing. Her desire for education was not to make her a better domestic being but a new individual, who did not fit in the agenda of reform of women by education. Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain very wittily turned the tables on male practices in *Sultana’s Dream* (1905) where she introduces the ‘purdah’ as a metaphor of patriarchal practices and ideas that tend to shut women from the possibility of another world which the writer suggests they could easily obtain if women were allowed to use their skills and potentials to the utmost. However, Rokeya’s school set up for Muslim girls in Calcutta in 1911 conformed to all constrictions in curriculum and practice that were the norm of the day, while she wrote stinging criticisms against the practices (Forbes 102). But, this, according to Forbes<sup>xiv</sup>, should not be seen as a wish to maintain status quo, but should be seen as how ‘new woman’ were learning about their boundaries, questioning the

sagacity of norms and fully participating in the redefinition of their futures (107-8). In 1891, Krishnabhabini Das writes in “Stree lok o Purush” (‘Women and Men’)<sup>xv</sup> published in *Bharati o Balak*: “Woman was not created to be the ignorant slave or the plaything of man. As it is the purpose of a woman’s life to do good to others, and to live for them, so does a woman live for herself. And the serious responsibilities that are entrusted to her demand not only a sympathetic heart, but also a cultivated mind” (trans. 23).

The emphasis on the possession of a ‘cultivated mind’ to ‘live for herself’, with its implicit implications of the upcoming class structure that the discourse of a *bhadramahila* was bringing up with it, also points at the shift from an earlier dependence of women on men for their deliverance, to women themselves, although not completely divorced from their necessitated roles within the household which is now seen as ‘serious responsibilities that are entrusted to her’. However, when Das asserts that women are no toys for men but have a stand of their own, she is effectively questioning the organisation of gender relations within the private domain and is also suggesting a social restructuring.

Under the impact of Swadeshi movement, which introduced a national educational programme on ‘national lines and under national control’, emphasis was laid on *atmashakti* which implied self-help and the building of character and the reassertion of national dignity, honour, confidence (Tharu & Lalita, vol.1, 136). It was by the release of the female vital principle of Shakti that the reform movement was supposed to gather force. Women were now supposed to lead the journey of patriotic sacrifice, and it is in this female figure that the nationalist imagination found its stronghold. While the image of this woman was projected as an amalgamation of domestic virtue, self-confidence and autonomy, her power laid in being the stern custodian of nation’s moral life. Many women joined the Gandhian non-movement to as if confront struggles that besotted them both within and outside their homes. Since gender was most intrinsic to these re-articulations of social and imaginative life which was significantly articulated by the women writers, they often came up with contradictory configurations of the impact nation had on women. While some writers managed the shift into modern times by staying on the side of the old order and also staking a not-so-conservative claim for women within the conservative themes of

nation, family, tradition, others interrogated and deflected that order and its new incarnations by examining it through a gendered lens. As such the ‘woman’s question’ instead of vanishing from debates of the times was just being posed by means of a gendered interrogation of the reformist ideology which had brought it up in the first place (Bagchi lx).

Women constantly questioned limitations and boundaries that were being set, thus putting up a rational, logical, argumentative resistance against norms. While women responded eagerly to Gandhian call for joining independence struggle, they also questioned this socially approved participation of women in the public sphere. As the spinning wheel, which became the symbol of women’s participation in the regeneration of the country, made sure that they did not have to leave their homes, and then, the strength of women was categorised as the feminine non-violent strength which was to be invoked in order to drive the brute masculine strength away, thus censuring woman’s militancy, pointed at how Gandhi indeed restricted the scope for women’s political involvement and growth, Sujata Patel points out (qtd. in Tharu & Lalita 181). Leelabati Roy’s “*Meyeder Upajukta Karmakshetra Ki?*”<sup>xvi</sup> (Which is the Ideal Sphere for Women’s Work?)(1940) questioned Gandhi’s insistence that women’s ‘special calling’ for work was the domestic sphere, thus restricting women to a particular sphere of work. She challenged the gendered idea of work stating, “The question is whether there is or there should be a special workplace for women” (trans. 362). Santisudha Ghosh in her essay, ‘*Nari o Uparjan*’ (‘Women and Employment’)<sup>xvii</sup> while discussing the new trend in the country regarding women’s employment categorically states that the categorisation of ‘work’ as permissible and non-permissible for women in the public domain is an idea that had recently evolved with respect to “the genteel society or those who try to imitate upper middle-class society” where women have recently started to make themselves visible in the public domain (trans. 389). The ‘newness’ in the idea of work does not include “the poverty-stricken people, who are not concerned about their status and gentility, do not care about this and both men and women work together to increase their earnings” (ibid:389). Further in the essay, Ghosh brings up the issues of women becoming self-sufficient, the reasonable demand for wages by married unemployed women for doing the household work (note that the erstwhile unpaid, naturalised labour given into household work is being urged to be considered equivalent to paid labour), the illogical reservations against the earning of a living by

unmarried woman. She states that the society requires both men and women to evolve in a way that they might be holistically contributive to the development. This idea definitely echoes that of Roy where she states that “for the complete development of an individual, the coexistence of both these sorts of work (women’s work comprising of household work and men’s work comprising of nation building) is important for both men and women” (trans. 363).

As the discourses around education and training for women began to gather enough currency, a new discourse around the feminine idea of work evolved. Sukhlata Raowrites in her 1931 essay, “Adarsha Nari” (‘The Ideal Woman’)<sup>xviii</sup> published in *Bangalakhmi*, about the different spheres of woman’s work:

“While some women are serving the country; some are selflessly engaged in stabilizing the home and family. Some have even dedicated their lives for eudaemonia [human welfare/happiness] without any heed of their own well-being. Some have taken up the promotion of education as their life’s objective. Others have devoted their lives to the welfare of women and society” (trans. 251)

The strain that is amplified here is that while the sphere of women’s work have expanded allowing them to move from the confines of their homes to the larger public space, women’s work is considered to be intricately connected to serving the greater good for the society and thus the movement is from the betterment of home to the betterment of nation. This work is definitely differentiated from *chakri* or job which has an implicit class consciousness associated with it; hence it is not labour. This work is *deshar kaj*, work for the country, the country which requires *swadhinata* or freedom, just as women do. In 1931, Sri Sita Devi in ‘Narir Nagarik Dayitto’ (‘The Duties of Women as Citizens’)<sup>xix</sup>, wrote in favour of women’s moving out into the public domain and establishing themselves in spheres hitherto constricted as male, like the police system, the judiciary, medicine, so that these spheres could benefit from the emotional economy that women could bring into their work by their effective experience of doing so in the private domain of family (trans. 326). Thus while work for women seems to be understood by an overlapping of the private and public domain, women’s emancipation as a political subject must also be defined by newer contours. Begum Shamsun Nahar in ‘Narir Rashtranaitik Adhikar’ (1935) (‘Political Rights Of Women’)<sup>xx</sup> asserts for the need of universal adult franchise for women because, she



states, “women in every part of the country are able to express their views in political matters, a new era will begin in the history of the country” (trans. 344).

Hence women were trying to find their new selves by inscribing themselves within the narrative of the nation, by recognizing pathways of women’s development, by being constantly engaged in the arduous task of bringing together the private and the public in a balance (Bagchi lxi). They were also trying to interrogate the more contested social and cultural territories when they tried to overturn class consciousness that was etched in the constrained figure of the *bhadramohila* stating that ‘*bhadramohila*’ could be an all-encompassing category provided women’s education was widespread (Indira Devi Chaudhurani<sup>xxi</sup>). The need to find communion among women of all kinds seemed to upsurge when it was realised that the idea of Indian women could not be contained within a monolithic upper class, Hindu woman identity (Sarala Devi Chaudhurani<sup>xxii</sup>). As the modern idea of nation was slowly consolidating itself in the imagination of the colonised, and along with this the identity of the ‘new woman’ was continuously being refurbished, especially in urban middle-class milieu of Calcutta (Bagchi, lxi), it becomes imperative to ask from when and in what ways did the era of modernity find its mark in women’s lives, especially among the urban, middle class women?

Modernity was a moment that seemed hard to grasp because of its nature of non-categorisation. Yet modernity encompassed that which is new, that which has absorbed the change, and also that which speaks of a continuous instability. In her analysis of Punyalata Chakraborty’s 1964 essay, “*Ekal Kokhon Shuru Holo*”<sup>xxiii</sup> (When this Era begun) which was published in *Anandabazaar Patrika*, Jayeeta Bagchi observes that speaking of ‘*kaal*’, time, Chakraborty talks about a society that was formed by the newly educated urban middle class and elites of both sexes. It was an era when the inner sanctum of the house, where an essential ‘Indianness’ was supposed to be preserved, had become highly problematized as the inner/outer, personal/public dichotomies were no longer unclouded divisions. Through the fissures that were developing within these compartmentalised zones, the writer went beyond the unproblematic binaries of “private/public, East/West, pure/sullied, innocent/guilty, tradition/modernity” (ibid:76) to assert and adopt the ambiguity of the ‘new’, not with contentment, but as a matter of being. As such, “For a particular class in colonial

Bengal the oppositional categories intermingle at a point in history extending one to the other making it impossible to dissociate them. This, for Punyalata, is modernity”, Bagchi observes (76). Grappling with the question, at which point did this modernity begin, Punyalata states, when a new educated society had risen intermingling the goodness of both the western and eastern civilisation, modernity might have begun. However, such an ushering of modernity and the acceptance of its contours for a redefinition of living was a dynamic process that has been going on since. Thus what is also important to note in Punyalata’s description of modernity is the rise of an ‘educated society’, not necessarily of men alone, but of a class which had turned a “‘static’ quality through an essential historical movement into a ‘dynamic process’ ushering in, what we generally term as, ‘modernity’” (ibid:77).

Modernity is a rupture in the flow of historical time, a continuous dynamic process, and hence comprising of moments of emancipation, often through an overlapping of the past into the present, thus projecting a continuity of stance. Thus, Punyalata writes, “Husbands were in favour of women’s freedom, against the custom of purdah- so the wives decided that they, as a protest against the purdah culture, would come out in the open streets without their veils” (qtd. in Bagchi 78). Hence while the husbands supported a cause, the wives took the decision. Thus modernity, Bagchi states, brings up an “alliance between inner and outer, public and private, west and east, support and decision, men and women that created modernity as manifested through something called an urban educated liberal/progressive society” (ibid:78). In women’s discourse modernity meant marriage between public and the private, where the inner sphere was no longer the undiluted realm of pure existence. In society, meaning modern society, Punyalata says, women have *saman dayitto*, equal responsibility/duty to build up the future of the nation, thus acting as a leveller of gendered hierarchies. But again, the politics of the gendered spaces which create this modernity might not always subscribe to this notion (ibid: 79).

Since modernity is such a contested issue, Chatterjee points out that nineteenth century literature is replete with images of change. For Rajnarayan Bose, *ekal* and *shekal* were frozen periods. But in women’s discourses, where women were already questioning the existential essences of being Indians and were coming out of its transfixed boundaries, “‘today’ was brought into being by ‘yesterday’” (Bagchi79).

Thus, Punyalata analyses, “Women desired to be liberal in ideas...they wanted their field of service and care to be extended beyond the four walls into a wide area” (qtd. in Bagchi 81). Thus urban women while responding to the call of turning into men’s and consequently nation’s ideal – good housekeepers and mothers...guardians of race, culture and tradition (ibid:81), also challenged and overturned the inherited practices by their own designs. The creation of the woman detective in Bengali fictions in 1950s may be emblematic of this transition. This transition had been brought about by an active participation of women in the public domains as writers who, along with other women motivators, were instrumental in bringing about an ideological change in women through the method of interrogating the given. Tanika Sarkar points out that there was a serious and felt need for “the modern woman to write in less gendered ways and to live in a less bifurcated world, her preferred move towards more universalist modes of knowledge” (qtd. in Bagchi 83). Literatures have been both influenced and influencer of changes in the social structure, continuously providing space to the ‘new’, accommodating constant re-evaluation to understand subjectivities which cannot be, therefore, divested from the particular, but contribute to understating the continuities and discontinuities through a historical process.

### 3.5.1. Prabhavati Debi Saraswati and her woman detective, Krishna

The novel *Krishna-r Porichay* (c. 1945)<sup>xxiv</sup> ends with an introduction to Krishna:

Do you know what Krishna says? She says she won’t marry. Breaking into the hideouts of evil doers, she would bring them out to light. She would redeem the society by unmasking the actual nature of the criminally inclined Dushyshans. And that will be her mission! (Prabhavati 62).

Prabhavati Debi Saraswati’s (1905-1972) creation of the woman detective, the first of its kind in Bengali fictions, at the momentous juncture of the nation’s independence must have had within it the agenda of bringing up a resilient self who would not be easily comprehensible, yet would be a power to reckon with. Bursting the myths about women’s weakness, brainlessness and lack of courage, Prabhavati’s innovative move in launching a young woman as a detective seems to find its rationale from the continuous experimentation in women’s writings which tried to interrogate all conventional structures. Prabhavati’s strategy to engage with this popular fictional form

during the heydays of her life as a writer can be discerned as quite interesting given the gendered stigmas attached to the genre. As the genre of detective fictions had already established itself as a male-centric genre where women were either positioned at the periphery or projected as the vicious opponents about whom the narrative constantly warned, to make a young woman credible as a detective would be quite a feat. However, given the times, the continuous engagement with the gendered understanding of societal structures, Prabhabati seemed determined to walk down the road not taken.

May be her unconventional life also served as an impetus. Married at the age of nine, Prabhabati wrote from an early age and continued doing so after she annulled her marriage shortly, and lived a travelling life because of her father's transferrable job. A writer of immensely popular domestic novels, which were not only translated into languages like Hindi and transcreated into movies during her lifetime<sup>xxv</sup>, Prabhabati's novels continuously peaked into the various ramifications of marriage as portrayed through her women characters. An activist for women's rights and women's education all her life, her novels seem to apparently reflect the popular, contemporary times which resonated through contemporary ideologies pertaining to nation, tradition, culture, beliefs. Women could be seen as her vehicle of debating the issues of compliance and contestation against societal expectations. While her novels, with their sensational titles, could be regarded as appealing to the patriarchal *bhadralok* consciousness, thus consolidating her popularity with unflinching regularity, it is also too simplistic to assume that a woman whose personal life had been full of unlearning and the unusual would not try to delve into the deeper critical issues of forming the notions of the female self, beyond the boundaries of the known. While her characters fulfilled the conventional roles of women, and would take a detour of nonconformity to arrive at the norm, they were made to voice their opinions and assert their choices. They laid bare the ruptures that were slowly affecting the traditional image of Indian womanhood, thus bearing signals of change which the era professed.

Prabhathi's Krishna seemed to provide her with the platform to assert herself most vigorously. May be because of the masculine characteristics that the genre already bore which Prabhabati both criticised and adhered to at times, or because the idea of femininity she wanted to experiment with here was somewhat radical, that Krishna was continuously framed within tropes of a revolutionary woman who shocked and

threatened norms. After the publication of the first novel, *GG*<sup>xxvi</sup>, as part of the *Krishna* series by Dev Sahitya Kutir<sup>xxvii</sup>, in 1952, the second novel of the series, *HP*<sup>xxviii</sup> c.1953 was advertised bearing Vivekananda's nationalist dictum, "When one's mother's voice reverberates in slavery/ whether weak or strong, will he mind?" (qtd in Ghosh<sup>xxix</sup> 71), thus hinting at a sense of fiery nationalism that these stories wish to adopt from, and also transform it to suit their feminist agenda. Hence Prabhavati calls her detective 'Krishna', a name that alludes to the fiery, vigorous, mercurial Draupadi who could be discerned as an equivalent to man in all respects (Ghosh 78). Thus, the 1952 advertisement of the *Krishna* novel proclaims the need for such fiery spirits among the women of the newly independent nation who must be able to stand up against the atrocities directed towards them by the autocratic patriarchal systems which they must break free from; the stories in the *Krishna* series professed to be their guide (Ghosh 71).

The seven novels<sup>xxx</sup> that Prabhavati had written featuring Krishna as the detective had been immensely popular at that time. In the first novel, *GG* (1952) Krishna is posed as an outsider. She is escaping from Burma, where she has spent her formative years, with her illustrious police officer father. Her mother has been murdered while they have been threatened with the same by an atrocious Burmese dacoit named, Yu-yin. An outsider to Bengali culture, she is tutored by her father to uphold a brave, strong, daunting personality as he regards the meek, weak, submissive Bengali *bhadramohila*, like his wife, with high disdain. Hence Krishna is envisioned as a foil to the stereotypical Bengali woman, who answering to the call of the moment must give in to change. This defiance of traditional orthodoxy, promoted by a father-figure, might also serve as an attestation of the new patriarchy towards the new woman, who could become modern within limits, but again must go beyond the stereotypical idea of women posed by the nation. Thus Krishna is "not quiet or meek or coward like the girls of her age or like the boys of her age belonging to any Bengali household" (*GG*23) while also being fluent in many languages, driving well and being an expert horse-rider. She has accompanied her father in hunting expeditions, and possesses "a well-built body that is as strong as her self-confidence" (ibid: 24). The repetitive disdain of Bengaliness seems to become a necessity in order to create a character that is already considered a deviation and an imposition by extension on Bengali imagination of a *bhadramohila*, hence a resistant figure of woman. With ease she occupies public spaces (hunting expeditions), public roles (driving cars) and also possesses a fit body,

which is the prerogative for most detectives. Unlike the male detectives in the genre, she needs a greenroom to prepare herself to shock the unprepared mind of the reader to receive her. This outsider-insider strategy that Prabhathi plays, by which Krishna considers Burma her home and Bengal, a displacement, while trying to accommodate her progressive attitudes into a conservative Bengali cultural framework. Her own idea of modernity, constantly allows an accommodation of shock, so that Krishna ultimately appears convincing to a Bengali mind. This daunting, vigorous, fiery spirited woman continuously rallies for women's emancipation, resists women's dominance and fights for women equality. She constantly urges people to look beyond the gendered subjugation so that women can be given their rightful place. Moreover, she urges women to look for their potential and work upon themselves:

With a stern voice Krishna said, "Women are humans too, *meshomashai*. I just intend to show that if educated and trained well they can also deliver work like men. For a long time women have been relegated to darkness which has not allowed them to progress. I would only want to tell them, that no more can they languish behind, they must come forward, they must work and in every field they must leave the imprint of their courage and strength" (*Graher Pher*<sup>xxx</sup> 56).

Thus with Krishna Prabhathi intended to strike at the merciless gendered construction of the genre of Indian detective fictions which wanted to subdue all possibilities for a credible character of the woman detective who could meet up to the standards laid down by the masculine verisimilitude of the genre. While Prabhathi was continuously trying to eke out a space for the woman detective, it seems she also had to bow down to indoctrinate Krishna into the quintessential *bhadralok* culture may be because she did not wish to pose Krishna as a complete stranger to Bengali culture but as someone, who knowing her limitations, would be able to pave the pathway for emancipation. Hence while constantly reiterating that Krishna's courage and potential stood unmatched with any ordinary Bengali woman, Prabhathi also tried to continuously legitimise her woman detective by strategizing her acceptability. Prabhathi writes in the advertisement of *Mayabi Krishna*:

This genteel and respectable young girl, by the sheer dint of her presence of mind, sometimes by employing disguise...is achieving unparalleled success....Protecting herself from the grip of the autocratic, manipulative, ferocious (male) lot, keeping her womanly obligation and respect unscathed, the

novel tricks she devises to defend herself and rescue the victimised women is possible only by a highly educated and well-bred woman of class and descent (qtd. in Ghosh 71).

Hence her digression is bound by limits; she must keep her 'womanly obligation and respect unscathed'; she is still a rescuer of the marginalised; but her actual acceptance lies in being 'highly educated and well-bred'. However, all of these ideas are merged with newly acknowledged qualities in women- presence of mind, a healthy body, flexible public appearance and mobility. Hence while Prabhavati's Krishna is pregnant with possibilities of emancipation, she is not able to disregard the nature of all constraints. She maneuvers tradition to reassert them, at times. She breaks down the stereotype of the meek, submissive, humble Bengali woman to create another stereotype of the courageous, outspoken, daunting, fiery, independent woman, which might at times appear unrealistic. However, Prabhavati's contribution lies in the move of experimenting with the boundaries laid down for women, which was further explored by women writers who later created women detectives. Be it Nalini Das who created a team of four young girls in her *Goyenda Gondalu* series<sup>xxxii</sup>, or Suchitra Bhattacharya who created Mitin in her Mitin Maashi series, or even Tapan Bandhopadhyay, for that matter, who created Gargi in his *Goyenda Gargi* series<sup>xxxiii</sup>, women detectives in Bengali fictions (and by extension in Indian fictions) located themselves in the field of high experimentation with the character of the woman detective after this nascent, and often obscured experiment by Prabhavati. She opened up avenues to imagine a woman as a detective; however, a woman detective by her mere presence cannot always problematize the scenario if she is not seen as challenging the masculinist terms of canon formation. There is a requirement to refurbish ways in which women detectives can create a canon in keeping with the transitions in the political, social, cultural scenario that has been undergoing rapid overhaul since independence. Prabhavati's endeavour seemed to make these problems in the characterisation of the woman detective quite conspicuous which were dealt with enough seriousness as women's movements and literary endeavours forced a rethinking of canon formation.

Sumit Sarkar points out that the most compelling imaginative task of the period seems to lie in the creation of the new resilient self, one that is not easily understood or explained, but is, all the same, a power to be reckoned with (qtd. in Tharu & Lalita 74).

While most of the fictions of the period written by women seem to confine women and their understandings to the familiar space of the domestic, they continue to map women's slow but unmistakable and moving struggles for dignity and personhood outside the double-edged promises of the Enlightenment and the social reform. Going by the popularity of these writers it might be discerned that although the struggle of these writers seemed to be a lonely struggle, it was a struggle that was well recognised by the women of the period as realist. The woman novelist tends to hide shock waves within her narratives, shocks that would allow her to resettle in the already unsettled land, marred by contingent patriarchal forces.

### 3.6. The Independent nation and women's writings

The 'imagined community' of a nation often renders suppression of multiple voices in order to flourish a homogenous 'social imaginary'. May be it is due to this coerced formulation of unity that nation is constantly recreated: "contested, fractured, elaborated, redistributed, and rewritten, as new resolutions are negotiated" (Tharu & Lalita<sup>xxxiv</sup>, vol.2, 45). Hence just as nation is always considered to be in the process of making, the same may apply for citizen-subjects who may be understood as subjects-in-struggle (ibid: 218). Therefore, for a nation its closures are never complete.

The literatures of forties and fifties articulate the birth of the Indian nation, which in a way underwrites culture and politics way into the nineties. The sculpting of the idea of nation required a careful dismantling of all oppositional energies so that revolution, resistance, confrontation, struggle could be contained, and suppressed by the all-encompassing benevolent image of the nation. While the disciplines of sociology and anthropology were directed towards empirically consolidating the idea of nation, literatures, like the "foundational fictions" of the nation, Nehru's *Discovery of India* (1946) was directed to create the reader-citizen whom Nehru addresses as the new-Indian-in-the-making who was, indeed, being shaped by the narrative.

In fact, new patriarchies were constituted which gave shape to a brand new nation that essentially had an upper class, middle class and a male point of view (Tharu & Lalita, vol. 2, 112). The multiple struggles which had brought the nation to its new independent status were contained within the quietest language of social policy and legislative reform. In fact the political edge of women's movements also seemed to become blunt when the 'woman's question' was transmuted into a policy question, a



potent cause surfacing during elections. When Swadeshi movements tried to inscribe the idea of the Indian self within an essentially spiritual, Hindu ideology, thus, othering all forms of religion practised in India, it was borne on women to disseminate and consolidate such an imagination, being left with almost no space to evolve beyond the aspirations of a rising nation. When women engaged themselves with cultural movements, like the Progressive Writers' Association, inspired by its socialist sympathies, the 'woman's question' was draped around the contours of this being a social problem whose resolution lied in the overthrowing of capitalism. Overthrowing of constraints was made a matter of personal triumph, while the various coordinates of patriarchy which could make such a battle impossible was not called to task. Women's issues boiled down to reflect those of the middleclass woman who also suited the ideology of the new born nation. Women's demands for equality suited the political framework of the nation, and with the conferring of electoral equality, all differences in gender question was waived. When such political accommodation was made it was thought that any lagging behind of women was a personal fault.

But, women's issues were varied, and to only acknowledge that which stood within the political frame, was definitely a myopic vision of such articulations. The subjugation of women had been rendered completely invisible in the ideology of liberal nationalism (Tharu & Lalita, Vol.2,110). By seventies, however, the cracks had begun to show, the untidy surface below had begun to emerge. The admirable acts of heroism by the state had opened up interrogations regarding their enactment and their aftermath. As seventies evolved a number of authorities which had once administered the lives of women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were questioned and also reconstituted. As the late sixties saw the Nehruvian economic vision dissipate, the country had to open itself up to the international markets, which was further consolidated by economic liberalisation in the eighties. However, while majority of the population continued to remain below poverty line, and peripheral regions remained invisible, the metros gradually witnessed the creeping in of the twenty-first century. Amidst increasing unemployment, price rise, food riots, starvation deaths, the conventionally dismissed and politically contained section of the population began to raise their voices. Most prominent among these raising voices were those of women who took to the streets, picked up pens, and captured the agitation, repressions and the violence of the times, in their creative works. These movements went on to redefine

their stand within the national polity as the national framework and its narratives were in turn interrogated.

If the oppositional movements of the late sixties and early seventies and the resistance to the 1975-77 emergency mark one beginning of the current phase of the women's movement in India, the publication in 1974 of *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India* is another. The well documented report revealed the unequal access of women to development and to education and health, their political and economic participation, and their status under the law, among other things, continued to be in post-Independence India. The effect of the report was tremendous. By the late seventies issues related to women were gathering centre stage, and women organisations came up everywhere. Questions raised by women's movements quickly pointed out the grave disparities that existed in the social architecture where women always had to pay the cost of the nation's economic progress. Women must always bear the brunt of homelessness, displacement, and poverty. In the late seventies middle-class feminist in the cities and feminist scholars in social sciences took up issues related to family violence, the law, the household, education, health care, media, women's work and working conditions, thus helping to relocate political practice. The battles in the seventies gave birth to radical new generation of political awareness and engagement. Various silenced and expropriated groups articulated their grievances and made their claims with a new confidence. Women's writings bore the imprint of the transformation sought and the changes taking place.

When equality remained constrained within legislative norms, when the question of empowerment and improvement became a mirage, when women's movements across the world confronted the "ideological and social apparatus of patriarchal control" (Sen & Dhawan<sup>xxxv</sup> 13), the global circulation of feminist ideas strengthened national women movements anew in the seventies and eighties. Discrimination against women was reportedly rampant and women's security and improvement always put at the stake. Thus emerged "a new energetic women's movement with a self-conscious gender politics" (ibid: 14).

Deflection towards complexities that evolve within and through gender relations becomes extremely important when a movement, which needs to have ideological commonality, has to gather force within the politics of plurality that Indian

women exemplify. Gender relations have been pivotal in the understanding of various dynamics of social change interred within colonial politics which seem to constantly affect our understanding of women's position in contemporary times. The 'dual paradoxical attitude' of the state-both the colonial state and the independent nation state- towards 'woman's question' has led to only a rising of legislative reforms (Sen & Dhawan 3). However, these progressive legislations have hardly found proper implementation because of the lackadaisical attitude of the state owing to its paternalistic attitude towards women, and its "upholding and sustaining of the patriarchal institutions and instruments, both by omission and commission" (ibid: 3). These graving disparities were brought to the fore by the *Towards Equality* report which consequently turned attention, once again after the colonial period, to the problematics evolving out of gender question. This is not to mean that the problematic of gender had vapourized in the intervening years. In fact, the report made it clear that it was lying dormant and functioning its way to corrode women's position within the society since the colonial period with no alteration (ibid: 4). This moment erupted consolidated action from within feminist organisations which we can know about from pages of history; it is as a result of these movements that many such voices buried under the debris of history was brought to the fore to raise questions regarding the hegemonic forces operating within knowledge production systems.

The impetus of the new women's movements, therefore, found multiple coordinates of endeavouring debates, discussions, demonstrations to voice the demands for change. From class critiques to caste-based struggles, struggles around land, consumers rights for women, work, food-thus having an all-encompassing social, cultural and political dimension. Moreover, these movements, at the beginning in around 1970s, operated autonomously, focussing more on local issues and deliberating on local lines instead of mooted for nationally woven organisations. However, the convergence lay in the attempts of these movements to horizontally and vertically draw impetus from each other which made these movements "a self-conscious commitment to both popular and feminist politics" (Sen & Dhawan 15).

This is not to say that women's movements have not been conscious of the fragility that the movements' pace has intermittently suffered due to the disruptions in caste, class and community lines which has also given the movements the impetus to

refurbish its ideals and agendas. From 1990s onwards, following the nation's commitment to economic liberalisation which turned economic policies towards market driven solutions for questions of poverty and social security, women's movements have been more sceptic of state-led forces of change (ibid: 25). While this has led to the evolution of the NGO-forums, following the UN women's conference at Beijing in 1995, thus, endowing women's movements with vibrancy and continuing importance, women's movements have also realised that talking of women in India always meant talking through an intersection of various social and cultural coordinates.

One of the most significant consequences of women's movements post-Independence was the initiation of women's studies departments across the country with the transformative vision of generating and disseminating knowledge about social change, building connections among struggles for social justice and, most significantly, achieving gender equality, not just within the institutionalised structures of the discipline but also going beyond into active participation with women's realities (Banerjee<sup>xxxvi</sup> et.al xix). Despite the limitations that institutionalisation offers, women's studies programmes tend to develop a forum where field studies could be directly opened up for feminist intervention. Indian feminism has challenged complacency of universalism by bringing to surface the issues of plurality, and the possibilities of struggles within the interstices of power. Indian feminists have consequently interrogated relationship between gender and state, while struggling to with the notion of difference in gender and by interlocking this coordinate with those of caste, class, race, religion, and other such categories.

Women's studies have been able to confer visibility to women's issues which were hitherto considered inconsequential. Researches have been instrumental in unwrapping the workings of underlying patriarchies within social systems which construed to make women invisible, and their contributions left out of social accounting. However, the practice of plurality, which foregrounded the understanding of multiple patriarchies, also insisted that there should be narratives of multiple emancipations with the politics of difference at the core (Banerjee et. al. xxxvi). Hence when we are using the category 'woman', it must be borne in mind that while we cannot blunt the political edge of experience by considering it too personal, we must also avoid being essentialist and considering experience as empirical data that could

stand for all. Considering that the fluidity of women's experiences has an important bearing on the construction of women's identity, theorizing women's identity requires to taking into account contingencies and historical specificities. Banerjee et. al., therefore, point out that it becomes important to question the ambiguities that lay in both the structures and processes of creating subjectivities, which may appear fixed, but are actually always and continually changing (ibid: xli). As such it becomes significant to analyse gender relations by directing one's attention to the local processes and women's agencies to include the everyday of women's existence and meanings, to witness the meaning-making processes in which a woman partakes with the social and the cultural sites of subordination and dominance.

Akin to the colonial period when women vented their concerns through their writings, the comingled effect of women's movements, the upsurge of women's studies and the critical direction that feminist scholarship took directed women's writings to look into the apparently unproblematic sites of social history and culture, and unearth the politics of silencing, domination and subordination therein. As in the colonial era women's bodies and sexualities have always been considered as sites for the articulation and rearticulation of Indian culture (Panjabi & Chakravarti<sup>xxxvii</sup> xx), there have also been oppositional and conflictual forces at work which have made culture dynamic rather than static, which continuously foregrounded women's questions from different vantage points.

As already mentioned post independent women's movements challenged the ideological roles of women both as "signifier and site of Indian culture" (ibid: xxvi) by emphasizing on the need to expand and free cultural associations from a particular class and community of women (ibid: xxvi). Thus while *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (Sangari and Vaid 1989) directed attention towards generating history from the view point of gender, it used an essentially middle class lens, a limitation the editors acknowledged in their 'Introduction' to the volume, thereby opening up the need to articulate an understanding of women from varied positions. The two volumes of *Women Writing in India* (Tharu & Lalita 1991, 1993) launched a wide canvas, in terms of periods, cutting across class, caste, for understanding how Indian women have continuously negotiated with processes of "systematic suppression, erasure and decanonization of their voices in order to express themselves" (Panjabi & Chakravarti

xxvi). Narratives of various kinds emerged which became the principal tools with which the new Indian and her world is sculpted, and a new social imaginary is secured, though the increasingly popular genres that purport to deal with facts like documentary films, news magazines, and indeed history itself. While contemporary mass movements like the ‘Pink Chaddi’ campaigns (2009) or ‘#metoo’ movements open up avenues to comprehend the dynamics of voicing and silencing that is at work within the societal and cultural structures of society, it goes on to confer political significance to such performance of protests where, as Trina Nileena Banerjee asserts, performance “must not only create registers where they do not exist... [it] must also continually break down and deconstruct existing registers...” (qtd. in Panjabi & Chakravarti xxi). Hence as Mahasweta Devi’s story ‘Draupadi’ (1978) overturns the equations of power inscribed within a woman’s body when a Santhal woman during the Naxalite movement, Comrade Dopdi, refuses to clothe her mutilated body, subject to repeated torture and gangrape by the police, by thrusting it at the police officer, it “underlines the close interweaving of myth and reality and culture and politics in women’s languages of protest” (ibid: xxxi). In a similar way the focus on alternate methods of articulating women’s experiences, especially through oral narratives, gained prominence with works like *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People’s Struggles* (Stree Shakti Sangathana 1989) which spoke of patriarchies entrenched even with progressive endeavours. Urbashi Butalia’s work partition history, *The Other Side of Silence* (1998) not only opened up interrogation of the gendering of history as sponsored by the state, but it also projected oral narratives and experience as valid resources of historical and cultural knowledge which could allow us to have different perspectives of history, instead of a monolithic, vertical concept.

Hence the changing significance of culture and its relationship to community, caste, class and gender have critical implication in women’s lives today which has been fostered by a serious practice of feminist scholarship. While violence against women has been identified as having various dimensions from its visible forms of physical assault to its invisible forms of abuse and torture, feminist analysis also exposes the hidden workings of patriarchies in families, religion, educational systems and such social and cultural institutions. They have mapped and remapped understandings pertaining to women’s work, health, employment, power, particularly in terms of

globalisation. At the same time feminist scholarship has also been able to dismantle the hierarchies within cultural tropes thus enabling a widening the field of examination of popular forms of culture to understand the workings of varied forms of patriarchies in common, everyday lives. Popular modes of culture like daily soaps, advertisements, blogs, feminist e-magazines, social media, and other forms of cultural texts are constantly trying to jostle with the changing social and cultural geography of the country, based on gender lines. Of course the limitations of a consumer culture cannot be overlooked; yet the negotiations that feminist movements have been able to open up in a mass domain cannot be disregarded either.

### 3.7. The recent Women writers and women detectives

The tension between literary embodiments and lived realities, which is at the heart of narrative practices, point at historical continuities which consider the relationship between gender and textuality as integral to understanding the literature and culture of any given space in any given time. Since women have been both the site and agent of intense literary and critical activity, women have always been impacted by the various cultural forms of that depict their experiences, needs, desires and silences. Feminist engagements with these cultural forms have allowed unearthing the inexhaustible complexities that go into their making, especially those by women. Women's decision to write about women can be discerned as a feminist decision that unmistakably bears imprints of the cultural lives women live and experience or an everyday basis, thus making the writing woman a metaphor of change. As these women writers challenge social organization and question the prescriptive norms, women's writings have always been able to draw the cultural politics of textual practice anew, thus signaling alignment between feminist politics and the popular.

Women's movements in colonial period allowed, among others, the upsurge of upper class and middle class urban women writers who traversed across genres of literatures to interrogate and counter the male dominance in canon formation and also the patriarchal strategies of the genre. This can be regarded as the impetus behind Prabhavati Debi Saraswati's *Krishna* series, which will be elaborated further in the ensuing chapters. Such a sustained effort in the creation of the woman detective seems to surface again in post-1990s when women's movements and the critical lens of feminist critiques provided a scope for differential perception. Detective fictions,

because of its gendered structure, provided ample grounds for experimentation with these emerging ideas of feminism, especially now when it was all set to cast a new look on the structures and institutions that were intricately associated with the lives of Indian women. While violence and its various ramifications have never been able to forsake discussions focusing on women, the ideas of family, work and nation also seem to be closely associated with the life of an Indian woman on whom these are laden as cultural baggage. Feminist movements allowed the refurbishing of ideas regarding the latter, while enhancing awareness about the former. Women subjectivities inevitably challenged the monolithic ideas that tried to inform their subjectivities while continuously showing woman to be a social and cultural construct who could not be understood through a singular meaning making process. The movements ultimately asserted the need to contextualize women subjectivities, while taking care that experience does not become the empirical data to make women fit into a particular form of feminism. As Indian women's detective fictions provided fertile grounds for experimentation, there seems to be a gradual rise in the number of writers who engaged in the endeavor. Besides the regional writers, there has been quite a proliferation of women writers who have tried their hands in the genre in Indian English. While experiments with the local character of the genre has been quite prolific, the emerging writers, being the exponent of a new class of Indian English writing, also target the global market of the travelling genre of detective fictions. As such experiments have been varied, the impact, wide-ranging.

Popular fictions serve the purpose of disseminating ideas to a mass audience while also being influenced by those notions. Women have always been the target of genre fictions which have been able to combine various tropes in the narration of an imaginative reality. Genre fiction's reachability allows it to carry forward issues and non-issues with ease that confers prolific meanings to redundant and even oft-discussed subjects. Gendered complexities are oft discussed issues which, by their over usage at times, tend to make a subject deflect from seriousness. Detective fictions, by their characteristic tropes have made use of gendered concepts not only in their conventional forms, but also as a counter discourse. The very creation of a woman detective as an intervention, or incorporation, in the gendered genre of Indian detective fictions tends to create scope for counter discourse by the tropes which make these fictions. As such women writing woman detectives can be considered an interesting phenomenon that



could provide new meanings to the very genre detective fictions in India. However, the genre of detective fiction in India, despite being prolific is less known, and the corpus of woman detectives even lesser. This research intends to deal with four Indian women writers of women detectives, besides Prabhavati's Krishna who has been discussed earlier. These stories are still in circulation, while some writers have published latest book in the series in 2019.

### 3.7.1. **Suchitra Bhattacharya and her woman detective, Pragyaparamita (aka Mitin Maashi)**

With no intention of venturing into writing detective fictions, a prolific writer of social and domestic novels, Suchitra Bhattacharya, ended up writing more than a dozen books featuring her middle aged 'homely' detective, Pragyaparamita Mukherjee, popular as Mitin Maashi. Born in the 50's in Bihar, Suchitra's luminous writing career is dotted with extraordinary pieces of literature like *Dahan*, *Kacher Dewal*, *Hemonter Pakhi*, *Uro Megh* and a number of other novels where she has dealt with the precarious position of women, the conditions within a society in transition, the life of urban Bengali middle class women. Her engrossing power of storytelling and control over language has always won her numerous accolades while making her one of most read novelists in Bengali. The popularity of her novels may be gauged from the fact that, akin to Prabhavati, Suchitra's novels (*Dahan*, *Ichher Gaach*) have been scripted into films, besides being translated into many Indian languages. As such Suchitra's potential as a writer and a feminist was embedded in her popular modes of fictionalizing contemporary gender issues.

Her novels have always been able to touch upon relevant social issues of the contemporary times. Writing mainly about the urban middle class in Calcutta, Suchitra's novels have focused on conflicts within family relationships and the changing value system within the middle class lives. Crisis in human relationships and the changing values of the present era along with degeneration of the moral fibre of the society in the backdrop of globalization and consumerism are depicted in her prose. Exploitations and sufferings of women regardless of their social or economic identities find a distinct voice in her writing.

A popular novelist who has always been reckoned to speak up for women's issues, Suchitra, despite being fascinated by the imposing attraction of detective

fictions, always found herself confused about the intense male biasness of the genre. As Ashapurna Debi has always criticized the biasness of the genre, Suchitra, while finding herself following the acute skills of the detective, has been haunted by the questions: “Have the authors and the readers unconsciously decided that women do not possess the skill and potential of the brain to become a detective?” (Bhattacharya, *Mitin*<sup>xxviii</sup>, 2014). Her creation of the woman detective, Pragyaparamita, was based on her stern refusal to accept that physical and mental skills were domains of male potential alone: “It is to dispel such medieval ideas that my detective Pragyaparamita emerged” (ibid:). Suchitra’s detective is both an intervention and a counter discourse. As what seems like a conscious effort, Suchitra creates Mitin as “a contemporary, educated, agile, daring, adventurous *but* homely woman” (ibid: italics mine), trying to focus on the fact that such qualities, despite being considered masculine are not in opposition to a woman who might occupy the domestic space. Mitin, in Suchitra’s creative imagination, is someone who traverses both the spaces of the home and the world with equal deftness, however, without being too hyper about any of her roles. In her performance of all the roles there can be noticed a sense of passionate detachment which allows her to traverse many grounds with sagacity.

Mitin is, therefore, created as an ordinary woman who is embedded within a loving family structure, which often acts as a foil to the families into whose private spaces she must enter in order to solve the cases. Mitin is mostly seen within her home-carrying on with her household duties, looking after the upbringing of her son, Bumbum, cooking when required, otherwise depending on Bharati for her household chores, training Tupur, her niece (from whose perspectives the stories are told in third person), on detective skills, and engaging in playful banter with her husband, Partho. Partho has a printing press, an immense love for food, an amalgamation of pride and jealousy for his trophy wife whom he considers bereft of material sense, the material often being considered the male domain. Hence, while being attentive to solving every crossword puzzle available in the newspapers, Partho zealously keeps an eye on whether Mitin is quoting the right amount as her fees for the job. However, just as Mitin overturns all myths regarding women, she also manages her worldly concerns with enough dexterity. Partho stings her with his sarcasm on her wit and ability as a detective, as if always challenging her potential, which is presented in the way of playful banter. While Bumbum is oblivious as a child should be of whatever is going

on, he also provides a child's perspective to the narratives which sometimes breaks the monotony of seriousness that such narrations tend to get into. Tupur is an ardent fan of her *maashi* (maternal aunt) whom she idolizes in all respects. While playing Mitin's Watson in most of the cases, Tupur is keen about learning the skills from her *maashi*. Mitin believes that detection is about deduction through observation and to be observant one must practice enough. She also considers herself logical and seems to depend less on intuition to solve the cases. As such Mitin is found to be equally agile in the kitchen, and like any modern lady also handles technological instruments with the same skill. Thus as Suchitra say, "[she is ] someone who helps her son in doing his homework, skillfully cooks when required, and, slipping the revolver in her bag, chases miscreants with ease. While unwrapping mysteries is her profession, it is her passion too" (ibid: 'Introduction').

When the stories begin Mitin is in her early thirties and is an established professional detective who "runs after the wrong doers" in order to earn a living. The stories do not follow the trajectory of her entering the profession although her detective agency "Third Eye" is said to have earned a well-deserved reputation among the police and the detective departments of the state. However, she never fails to raise the doubtful eyebrow in the people she meets in her professional capacities and otherwise. While the elderly generation find it difficult to believe that a *bhadramohila* could have the logical reasoning capability associated with detectives, and could occupy public spaces mostly occupied by criminals, hence a taboo, the younger generation are often impressively surprised that a woman could be a detective. In both cases her acceptance is related to the obscuring caused by gendered perspectives.

It is in the pursuance of her passion that the narrative follows Mitin on the roads in Kolkata with which she is aptly conversant, mostly travelling in public vehicles, but sometimes driving her old Maruti 800. The narratives also follow Mitin to different places across the country where she goes, sometimes for her professional purpose, sometimes on a vacation with her family, and invariably stumbles upon mysteries. Even her family which travels with her, mostly comprising of Partho, Bumbum, Tupur and sometimes Tupur's parents, Abani, who is a professor in a college and a voracious reader, and Saheli, who is Mitin's elder sister and a foil to Mitin, get involved in the act of detection. However, Mitin maintains her professional ethics with insistent zeal.

Although the family is involved in the solving of her cases, the narrative never loses sight of this interesting young woman who successfully creates an aura around herself.

Mitin *maashi* narratives serve another conscious purpose. Suchitra states, “That the stories should weave interesting tales and facts from around the world, about various religions, and societies...that such facts should become part of the narrative themselves, not in the form of pedantry, but as a part of the tale has been my conscious effort” (ibid: ‘Introduction’). As such while Partho is presented as a connoisseur of histories and facts of a place, especially those associated with colonial Calcutta, Mitin is also seen as someone who is well conversant and even interested to understand and gather tales of places she visits. She, in communion with Partho, is able to provide sufficient information regarding places, peoples, cultures, societies, lifestyles, communities, often providing a perspective on the places which smoothly interlock with the narrative. This aspect of detective fictions often allows it to be considered as travel literature, while allowing the genre of detective fictions to be often constrained within juvenile fictions, disassociating it from any serious consideration. Again, Mitin’s perfection as a woman who achieves such a disciplined balance in life seems quite unrealistic. It seems that while Suchitra tried to overturn the isolated figure of a stereotypical detective, she somehow ventured to create an unrealistic superhero who, despite being an ordinary woman, seems plausible only in the pages of fiction. However, through Mitin and her life and also through the lives of the other characters Suchitra weaves perspectives into the middle class lives of people living mostly in urban Calcutta. The novels that this research would deal with are : Arakiel er Heeray (2009), Saarendeye Shoitaan (2003), Syander Saheb er Puthi (2016), Haatey Maatro Teen Tih Din (2011), Jonathan er Barir Bhoot (2004).

### 3.7.2. Kishwar Desai and her woman detective, Simran Singh

“From experience I know we have to redefine boundaries- push away the walls that block us” (Desai, *WTN*<sup>xxxix</sup>, 5), and Simran Singh, Kiran Desai’s woman detective does exactly that in all the three instalments that Desai has written featuring Simran as a detective. Simran seems to be consciously created as a woman detective not only because the stories foreground issues pertaining to various forms of exploitation and suppression with relation to gender, specifically women, but also in the way the detective is presented. While Mitin’s is placed within a domestic setup, which does not

constrain her, but nevertheless defines her, Simran is always seen in public-accommodating herself in hotels, police guest houses, taking risky disguises, gate crashing into prohibited spaces. An NGO-*wali*, who is also an amateur psychotherapist, as she considers herself, it is her passion for redefining boundaries that thrusts her into complex cases. She is not institutionalised as a detective, but it is her penchant for diving into the vortex of trouble that makes her the obvious choice of friends- police officers, doctors- or institutions to speak, to seek her help. As such, when Simran tries to fathom the ‘truth’, tries to unknot the knots, she follows no grammar, breaks her own rules and constantly pushes her ‘boundaries’ as a woman, as a detective, as a woman detective.

An active media personality who has adorned many professional hats, Kishwar Desai in her first novel, *Witness the Night* (2010), finely blends literary finesse and thrill in her narrative to present a racing tale of gruesome violence, the source and the ramifications of which lay far beyond what is visible. The narratives are in first person, often blended with other voices for perspective, which emerges as a significant tool in the narration of detective stories. It is extant and established norm that the detective must always be accompanied by an associate on whom is vested the responsibility of worlding the detective. The readers do not know the detective beyond this narrative voice so much so that these neutral, awestruck Watsons become an essential figure in the narration of detective stories. The detective remains a distant figure for the reader who must be contend with the twice removed idea of the detective figure with no glimpse into the workings of her mind. But Desai seems to push the boundaries of this classic device when she presents the detective as the narrator and allows the reader to understand the workings of her mind, her misgivings, frustrations, strengths, passion, all seem to come to the fore and she evolves as a plausible character. Desai seems to overturn the super heroic qualities often associated with a detective, who is out there to save the world, by making Simran confront unresolvable issues, by making her falter, by also making her plans fail, as she negotiates with the problems of everyday. Simran is an outsider because she is compulsively and consciously non-conformist, someone who constantly questions the given, the fact which stares at the face and allows her intuition along with logic and reason to untie the knots of complicated cases. She is an outsider to the detective genre also in the way that she allows her experiences to impact her personal life, thus presenting a redefinition of the public-private divide.

Simran is a cigarette-smoking, whiskey-swigging, unpaid NGO-*wali* who has spent her childhood in the small town of Jullunder. Like most of the woman detectives taken up for this research she is an urbane woman, but unlike most she is constantly in the process of rediscovering herself through the experiences she comes in contact with. Dark and khaki clad, she is forty years old, comfortable in her flabby drooping breasts, while weighing her possibilities of being involved in a romantic relationship with men she meets in the course of her work, men of varying age group and social positions. Hailing from an upper class Punjabi family with a mother constantly worried about getting Simran married, Simran has ideological differences with her mother. She is uncomfortable with the extravagance that her upper class life gives her, and tries to work toward ameliorating class differences, as such. She is shown as someone who is a nonconformist, who finds the aristocratic ways of her mother intolerable while nurturing deep sympathies for her hard working father who has a painful history of surviving through the menaces of Partition. In fact Desai weaves the stories keeping in mind the different struggles of women within the stringent divisions of caste, class, community lines which somehow seems to create commonalities through pain. These experiences allow Simran to continuously remake herself and find herself anew.

Simran is portrayed as an interesting amalgamation of courage, sagacity, intelligence, emotions that create her as a woman detective, for whom the cases she comes across are not just stray events, but find resonance with her life as a woman, and often leave behind an indelible mark. At the end of *WTN* Simran adopts Durga, the prime suspect, as her daughter, a step that embeds her within a family structure she had been considering impossible. Her emotional involvement in the cases, hereafter, finds another dimension, where she is not only concerned as a feminist, a social worker, but also as a mother figure, an emotion she does not restrict herself from. She is an emotional detective, and therein lies her unconventionality as a detective. Desai seems to negotiate with reason and emotion here, where she considers an amalgamation of the two to be a plausible potion for all human frailties to contain. Straddling between being a paid and a non-paid professional career, Simran's characterisation adds a new dimension to the character of the woman detective through this emotional investment that she fosters.

Simran's experiences allow her to understand the intricacies of the politics involved in lives which are spotted with corruption and danger. In fact Desai categorically refers to real life events which prompted are stories. Desai also seems quite naturally alarmed which she remarks, "There is complicity of corruption between the police, the judicial system, politicians, media, and uncivil society....and gender issues are still treated with contempt" (Author's Note, *WTN*). The three novels that Desai has written featuring Simran Singh take up complex issues related to gender. While *Witness the Night* (2010) weaves the complex tale of female foeticide with oppression of the girl child, it also looks into the various institutional practices that remain imbricated into the process of engendering women's suppression in all walks of life, so much so that fatalities like Durga and Sharda emerge from within the chaos thus created. In serious vein, *The Sea of Innocence* (2013) breaks into the idyllic ambience of Goa to make realities of violence and corruption surface. Simran's vacation in Goa with Durga turns dangerous for the latter as Simran is pulled into the core of the crime which involves power and brutality. Not only does she go about unwinding the lost threads of the case, she also finds out, not to her astonishment though that society is still cruel towards those who lie beyond the normative arrangement of sexuality and gender. In *Origins of Love* (2012) Simran discovers how the booming business of surrogacy in India is implicating the marginalised women who become targets of this business easily thinking that being a part of it would end their woes. However, they become part of another vicious cycle which wrings out any form of vitality from within them, considering them as incubators, commodities which must be able to deliver the best to the customers. It is important to note that while none of these cases are sorted in a way that a conventional detective novel would have been formulated, these novels open avenues to understand the genre of detective fictions in India, especially the way the genre is being reformulated from a feminist perspective.

### 3.7.3. Kalpana Swaminathan and her woman detective, Lalli

"Among other things, I collect curiosities" (Swaminathan, *P3M<sup>xl</sup>*, 6) - conceived during a bus-ride to work (*Tata Verve*)<sup>xli</sup>, Lalli, Kalpana Swaminathan's sixty-three year old detective, is a curious case to reckon to. A non-descript and non-interfering character, by Swaminathan's own description (*Tata*), Lalli is a puzzle and is content at that. The narrative, which follows Sita's narrative voice, Lalli being Sita's

chanced-upon aunt, resolves complex mysteries while shrouding Lalli in secrets which are never fully unknotted. Hence nothing much is known about her past life; she is all in the present, carefully hiding a “crowded life within her” (*P3M*, 4). For Swaminathan Lalli has been about a life that they both lived together, which has found new dimensions, passions, despairs, disappointments with every recurrence. That applies to the set of characters which recur in every story, along with Lalli- “Lalli’s coterie is part of my subconscious”- Swaminathan reveals (Tata).

Swaminathan, a surgeon by profession, who also writes with Ishrat Syed as Kalpish Ratna, ponders over the act of writing as she traverses through her Lalli oeuvre which has had interrupted frequency initially. The first book featuring Lalli, *Cryptic Death and Other Stories*, which is a collection of short stories that came out in 1997, was followed by *the page 3 murders*, a full scape novel that came out in 2006, a decade later after which Lalli stories have become more oftener. Swaminathan considers art to be emotional intelligence (Kale)<sup>xlii</sup> which is how she considers her writing of Lalli mysteries as well. For her a surgeon’s job is quite akin to writing because just as writing allows one to open up to understanding situations critically, surgery is also about understanding people in their difficult situations and providing them with a solution. Both take up an exploratory approach, high degree of concentration and sentient awareness, qualities which are also very useful to a writer. Both are humbling skills too, Swaminathan asserts (Harish *the reading desk*)<sup>xliii</sup>. Hence, Swaminathan makes her detective sensitive to the happenings around her; what sets her apart is that her sensitivity to life which has always allowed her to think one step ahead of what is available. This unassuming, surprisingly non-interfering, observant and disciplined old woman seems to be an appropriate fit for being a ‘new woman’ in a globalised era which she admixtures professionalism with reasonable emotion, knows where to draw a line, and where to toss over, has relationships beyond plausible arrangements. She does not hanker on to people or things, and despite the gruesome crime she witnesses and resolves, she never allows the despair that cruelty brings to her to overwhelm her.

The setting of the stories are in and around Mumbai, where scenes vibrant as its varied dimensions are brought to the fore by the characters in the novels. While Lalli lives in a modest middle class setting, she, along with the recurrent set of characters- Savio, Sita, Dr Q, Inspector Shukla – traverse the length and breathe of the metro



bringing to the fore the complexities that are embedded in the seemingly harmless neighbourhoods. Sita is the narrator of the stories. But unlike other narrators, who generally focus more on the detective focal figure more than on any one else, Sita adds a distinct flavour to the narrative where her focus wanders from herself to Lalli, to the other characters, and also to varied topics ranging from films, to literatures, to things that do not matter, to things that matter a lot- like food. Food is another important character in the Lalli stories where it serves as means of relaxation, detour, concentration and also revealer of mysteries. Its while learning how to bake that Lalli is able to get into the depths of a gruesome crime (*INK*).<sup>xliv</sup>

Its through Sita's narration and interpretative humour that we get to know Lalli, who is otherwise an obscure character. She had been working in the police force for thirty years before retiring which is when the stories begin (*P3M* 7). However, she is still considered the last resort when it comes to cases to be resolved by the police. Hence, "We keep at the end of file always, one blank sheet of paper with initials L.R.", informs Balkrishna, a police officer (*P3M* 10). Lalli comes without a surname, just as Sita. Except for some "surprised moments when the day falls away from her and she turns edgy with expectation" (*P3M* 4), Lalli's does not seem to betray too much emotions either. She presents a different idea of womanhood, where she is neither too emotional, like Simran, nor too professional, like Mitin, but has a balance which she shifts according to need.

While her potential for observation and deduction based on evidence might remind one of her celebrated male predecessors, it is in her tactics that Lalli appears to overturn the male pondering on logic, reason. She focuses more on common sense, acute observation, a penchant for details, a closeness to life, and most of all, the ability to extract information through small talk, or by indulging in gossips. She is not seen as adorning any disguises, and is capable of resolving the problems without much chaos. Swaminathan admits, "I created Lalli in her 60s as women of that age are usually less restricted and have no hang-ups, they are more curious and are naturally interested in human beings. Therefore, they often make better detectives when compared to men" (Chatterjee *India Today*).<sup>xlv</sup> Lalli is, therefore, curious about anything that tends to speak out the obvious but has a hidden layer of complexity. The family as the potential site of gendered crime is where Swaminathan locates most of the mysteries. However,

the gruesome crimes within the social structures and hierarchies are also explored. However, not all problems find solution, and Lalli, quite aware of certain unresolvable issues, allows it to be at that, which also enhances her human dimension. It is important to note that although the narrative never loses sight of Lalli, like Mitin *maashi* stories, the recurrent characters form a unit in the narrative. Lalli is aided by serendipity and helpful flunkies, she is extremely intelligent and daring, unafraid to take on the status quo, and ultimately singlehandedly solving her case. She interviews and investigates, pours over evidence, goes on late night drives to catch criminals, and trawls Twitter. She can be cold and calculating, but also shows unexpected humanity and tenderness. The beautiful thing about Lalli is that she is devoid of all glamour. She is an old, retired woman, outspoken, single, has strained relationships, and is not the most charitable in her judgment of other people. But she is also competent and courageous, and passionate about her work. This is a grey character that one has to consent with, and therein lies the power of Swaminathan's writing.

Lalli has a wide range of informants with whom she has an intimate relationship. In fact, her house is always open and has a steady stream of guests and some regular people who can be considered family. By not using a surname, both Lalli and Sita do not evoke a specific faith or regional identity. Both of them are representative of the middle class in a society which is heterogeneous in structure and exemplifies variation even in its middle class constituent. Hence Lalli stories traverses through various walks of the middleclass lives: of crimes which are multidimensional and cannot be summarised or even derided as events which are rare. They are about everyday realities which are often left unresolved. Of the many works by Swaminathan the research will concentrate on: *Page 3 Murder* (2006), *The Monochrome Madonna* (2010), *I Never Knew It Was You* (2012), *The Secret Gardener* (2013), *Greenlight* (2017).

#### 3.7.4. Madhumita Bhattacharya and her woman detective, Reema Ray

Madhumita Bhattacharya's Linked In<sup>xlvi</sup> profile provides a glimpse into the varied experiences that the author of the three Reema Ray mysteries has undergone as a professional writer. While writing for platforms ranging from the news media to content editing to reporting and blog management, the urgency to write has always lurked within her professional self. While such a conglomerate of experiences reveals

the diversity of podiums available to a modern day woman writer, it also makes it clear that Bhattacharya's experiences as a writer in various capacities informs the way she has conceived Reema Ray, her woman detective, who is serialized in three novels- *The Masala Murder* (2012), *Dead in a Mumbai Minute* (2014) and *Goa Undercover* (2016) all published by Pan Macmillan.

Her journey as a writer began with an urge to write; it also began with a query directed at herself- what was it that she had to say for herself? Her attempt to answer that made her tread different thresholds, till she realized, quite calculatingly and pragmatically, that fitting into a specific genre would not only allow her a concentrated exploration of the possibilities of the genre, but would also allow her to be able to converse with the requisitions of the publishing market. Hence she finds herself closing upon the detective genre, which like many of her antecedents, she had always been an ardent and voracious reader of (Bhattacharya, "Audacity of Hope"<sup>xlvii</sup>)

The Reema Ray series seems to hold corollary to the chick-lit genre of literature, where although the chick-lit is considered to dwell on newer aspects of life and living, they are often criticized for reasserting gender stereotypes. However, these texts also allow a space for redefinition of femininity as they portray the in-hand realities. Hence Bhattacharya's Reema Ray series can also be seen as pushing the boundaries of female experience where the series exhibits the evolution of the coming-of-age detective Reema Ray.

Reema Ray is a young woman of around thirty years, based in Kolkata when the first novel of the series, *The Masala Murder*<sup>xlviii</sup> begins, and is driven by her passion to become a professional detective. A failed relationship and a failed career move makes her ambitions boil down to becoming a detective which she had always nursed in her mind as an "equal parts of Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot, in a fetchingly female frame" (*TMM* 35). Her inability to adhere herself to any woman detective figure curiously signifies at how the bastion of detective fictions is strongly held by the popular male figures, which these fictions wished to overturn, by imitating those very males. Her interest in detection, therefore, emanated from detective novels, into which she poured during her childhood. It is in the perfect solutions to all problems that detective fictions offered that she found her alternative world of peace when her parents' relationship was breaking apart. Hence unlike the happy families of the other

detective figures mentioned here, Reema belongs to a broken family. The complexities of her personal life also seem to find expression in her overall demeanour. Unlike the confidence that the earlier discussed detectives exuded, Reema is somewhat diffident about herself and her choices. Of her appearance she says, "...the hot-chocolate skin and the head of uncontrollable curls made me stand out, much to my discomfort, when all I ever wanted was to blend in" (*TMM* 18). It is only after she is offered the job by Shayak's company is she able to find some stability of confidence in some sense; in some other sense, especially her relationship with Shayak, she is still uncertain and uncomfortable with. In a way it seems the novels try to trace an evolution in the bildungsroman genre.

However, she seems determined about her focus on being a detective, a professional at that. Her desire to be a detective has made her travel to the US to acquire professional degrees on courses related to crime, only to find out that within India, women as professional investigators cannot quite make a stand in the prejudiced Indian culture where detectives are considered petty beings who look into infidelity cases more than anything else. However, after deciding against a career in the police, she sets up her own detective agency and advertises herself as "Calcutta's 'most discreet investigator'" through classifieds (*TMM* 37). There is a sense of frustrated efforts in her when along with following her passion she also identifies herself as "Reema Ray, Food writer", because a "girl's gotta eat" (*TMM* 1), she asserts, making the insecurities within the profession quite palpable, especially for women. Reema frequently refers to her income (or the lack thereof) and includes references to salary negotiations, contracts and company policies as part of her work procedures. She becomes less idealistic about her profession, until rescued by Shayak, the glamorous director of a high-end professional, detective organisation. However, until then she survives more as a food writer than as a detective. It is this role that also provides her with a suitable cover to investigate the murder of a spice trader which is one of the two cases she investigates in *The Masala Murder*. The other case is looking for her ex-boyfriend's wife, for whom Amit cheated on Reema. It is interesting how the novels constantly show, in first person narrative, the dwindling emotions which constantly make and remake the detective. In terms of the double investigation, Reema initially feels that both cases are "out of [her] league" and go beyond her capabilities (*TMM* 106). As she is able to solve them both, she eventually gains self-assurance. As a

coming-of-age-story, this success does not only bring her appreciation from outside, but also makes her realize that she has chosen the right profession. However, while the credit for solving both cases goes to Reema, Shayak points out to her that it is important for a private investigator “to work inside the system” and not against the police (*TMM* 108). Reema joins Shayak and what is initiated is a complicated relationship between the two. Reema is an epitome of the young millennial who is continuously confronted by the alternative pulls of her life, which she deals with in an ambivalent way. While the cases take into the usual web of crime, distrust, murder, it is Reema’s evolution as a detective, as a professional and as a woman which becomes the most interesting aspect of this series.

### 3.8. On an onwards journey

There is, thus, a coterie of women writers writing detective fictions in the present times, having a distinct way of approaching and exploring the genre and its conventions. While, for almost all the recent writers, a preconception of the genre and its ways existed through an extensive reading of canonical texts, it is interesting that for them the genre has been about more than what was given to them. Their interventions into the genre are influenced by a common concern for gender inequalities, and the need for overturning the gendered norms of the genre. The genre of detective fictions has constantly exhibited a penchant for fitting into the local so much so that its variations are numerous. The corpus of Indian women detective too reorganises the genre conventions to suit their agenda, of which the women detectives are appropriate vehicles. These detectives imbibe from the societies in which they are embedded—whether it is Prabhavati’s Krishna, or Mitin, Reema, Lalli, and Simran. They continuously interrogate the given, yielding varied results.

There is also an interesting aspect related to the target audience of these creations. While Prabhavati intended to influence some change in the perspectives of college going girls and equip them with a broader understanding of life and its complexities<sup>xlix</sup>, Suchitra’s targeted the younger audience in order to instil in them an eye to view the diversity of the country. Desai and Swaminathan intended to explore the gendered structures of societal arrangements, besides various other tensions that lie below the seemingly unassuming surface. Bhattacharya projected the coming-of-age detective and her dilemmas which open up the need to review how we tend to perceive

personal and professional lives. However, while both the women writers who targeted teenagers were quite injudiciously relegated to the category of children's books, that is unfortunately yet to gather serious audience, the Indian English writers, despite targeting an adult audience, so to speak, are often derided as commercial fictions<sup>1</sup> and never allowed space into discussions which are propelled intellectually.

The emphasis on the need for such intellectual discussions on these books emanate from a very crucial point- intellectuals have the specific critical tools to look below the surface and explore the ramifications as the genre reaches out to the mass. These explorations can in turn become instrumental in gauging how ideas, when presented in the most receptive form, can effect social change, as is intended by the women writers, if at all. Intellectuals are not restricted to a narrow range of academics, but encompass an entire galaxy of people who use various forms of art to address their angst and effect change. Writers are intellectuals of the written word who have been instrumental in constantly affecting that idea of change and new through their essays, their critical works of non-fiction and also through their critical works of fictions. The feminist movements, both in colonial India and post-independent India, seem to have created the platform for invigorating a change in perspective as can be envisaged in the writings of the women writers discussed in the chapter, and also by this intervention of the woman detective into the stringently gendered genre of Indian detective fictions. A critical engagement might also open up possibilities to understand how such an intervention affected change in the perception of nation, family, work and violence which are so integral constituents of Indian women detective fictions, while also allowing a discussion on how such writings not only preconceive the idea of readership but also create, may be a new class of readership for itself which can engage with its vigorously complicated dimensions.

## NOTES

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- <sup>i</sup>Gill Plain and Susan Sellers. *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- <sup>ii</sup>Chandra Talpade Mohanty. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Padmini Mongia OUP, 1997. pp. 172-197.
- <sup>iii</sup>Talpade suggests that the relationship between 'Woman' – "a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse representational discourses" and 'women'- "real, material subjects of collective histories" is "an arbitrary relation set up by particular cultures" (ibid: 174). To thrust the ideas which evolve by studying women in their contexts on the figure of a composite 'Woman' as representative is reductive, Talpade suggests.
- <sup>iv</sup>Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. "Recasting Women: An Introduction." *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, Zubaan, 1989. pp. 1-33.
- <sup>v</sup>Elain Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979).
- <sup>vi</sup>Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. "Introduction." *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present: Vol. I: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century*, edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, The Feminist Press. 1991. pp. 1-37. [archive.org](https://archive.org/details/womenwritingin00thar) <https://archive.org/details/womenwritingin00thar> accessed on 20.03.2020.
- <sup>vii</sup>The 8<sup>th</sup> century Telegu poet, Muddupalani's poem, *Radhika Santwanam*, described a woman's perspective of longing and consummation of desire by a man in terms that were explicative of fulfilling the Indian aesthetic of *rasa* with an unmatched brilliance. It literally means, appeasing Radha.
- <sup>viii</sup>Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. "Literature of the Ancient and Medieval Periods: Reading Against the Orientalist Grain." *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present: Vol. I: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century*, edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, The Feminist Press. 1991. pp. 41-64. (access details above).
- <sup>ix</sup>Partha Chatterjee. *Our Modernity*, SEPHIS and CODESRIA, 1997. pp. 1-20.
- <sup>x</sup>Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. "Literature of the Reform and Nationalist Movement." *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present: Vol. I: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century*, edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, The Feminist Press. 1991. pp. 143-185. <https://archive.org/details/womenwritingin02thar/page/n9/mode/2up>.
- <sup>xi</sup>Jayeeta Bagchi. "Education and Gender in Nineteenth-Century Bengal: An Overview." *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi, Stree, 2014. pp. lix-lxvii.
- <sup>xii</sup>'Bangadeshiyo Mahilaganer Swadhinata Bishay'(1871). *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi. Trans. Prajnamita Dasgupta as 'Bengali Women and the Issue of Freedom', Stree, 2014. pp. 4-6.
- <sup>xiii</sup>Rashundari Devi wrote the first autobiography, *Amar Jibon (My Life)* in Bengali literature in 1876.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Geraldine Forbes. "Education for Women." *Women and Social Reform in Modern India*, edited by Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, Permanent Black, 2007. pp. 83-112.
- <sup>xv</sup>Krishnabhabini Das. 'Stree lok o Purush'(1890). *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi. Trans. Somesh Roy as 'Women and Men'. Stree. 2014. pp. 15-26.
- <sup>xvi</sup>Leelabati Roy. 'Meyeder Upajukta Karmakshetraki?'(1940) *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi. Trans. Swagata Bhattacharya as 'Which is the Ideal Sphere of Women's Work?', Stree, 2014. pp. 361-366.
- <sup>xvii</sup>Santisudha Ghosh. 'Nari o Uparjan' (n.d.) *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi. Trans. Anindita Roy as 'Women and Employment'. Stree. 2014. pp. 389-395.

<sup>xviii</sup>Sukhlata Rao. 'Adarsha Nari'(1931) *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*. edited by Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi. Trans. Jayeeta Bagchi as 'The Ideal Woman', Stree, 2014. pp. 250-253.

<sup>xix</sup>Sri Sita Devi. 'Narir Nagarik Dayitto' (1931) *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi. Trans. Debarati Chakraborty as 'The Duties of women as Citizens', Stree, 2014. pp. 323-328.

<sup>xx</sup> Begum Shamsun Nahar. 'Narir Rashtranaitik Adhikar'(1935) *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi. Trans. Debarati Chakraborty as 'Political Rights of Women'. Stree, 2014. pp. 340-345.

<sup>xxi</sup> Indira Debi Chadhurani. 'Stree Sikshar Adarsha Ki?'(1931) *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi. Trans. Priyanka Saha as 'What is the Ideal for women's Education?'. Stree, 2014. pp. 212-218.

<sup>xxii</sup>Sarala Debi Chaudhurani. 'Jogajog' (1911) *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi. Trans. Sudeshna Majumdar as 'Communion'. Stree, 2014. pp. 311-317.

<sup>xxiii</sup>Jayeeta Bagchi. "Ekaal Kokhon Shuru Holo? (When did this Era Begin?): Mapping Modernity in Women's Discourse in Colonial Bengal." *Scripting the Nation: Bengali Women's Writing, 1870s to 1960s*, by Anirban Das, Ritu Sen Chaudhuri, Jayeeta Bagchi, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, 2009. pp. 71-85.

<sup>xxiv</sup>Prabhabati Debi Saraswati. *Krishnar Porichay* in *Kanchenjunga Series* (Vol. 2). Deb Sahitya Kutir (Reprint) 2008. [Translations are mine].

<sup>xxv</sup> In 1932, her novel, *Shahadharmini*, was adapted for film at an era when mute films were made. Her novels were adapted for films in Hindi and also Malayalam. *Bijeeta* was adapted in Bengali as *Bhangagara*, in Hindi as *Bhabi*, and as *Kuldevam* in Malayalam.

<sup>xxvi</sup>Prabhabati Debi Saraswati. *Gupto Ghatak*. In *Kanchenjunga Series*. Vol. 3, Deb Sahitya Kutir, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2003. [Translations are mine].

<sup>xxvii</sup> Another detective series written by Prabhabati featured the woman detective, Agnishikha Ray. It was serialised in the *Kumarika Series* published by Deb Sahitya Kutir. This research concentrates on Krishna's character only.

<sup>xxviii</sup>Prabhabati Debi Saraswati. *Hatyar Pratishodh*. In *Kanchenjunga Series*. Vol. 3, Deb Sahitya Kutir, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2003. [Translations are mine].

<sup>xxix</sup>Nirmalya Ghosh. "Goyendanir Shatkahan." *Bangla Goyenda Sahitya Sankha*, edited by Tapash Bhaumik, *Korok Sahitya Patrika*, 2017. pp. 67-79. [Translations are mine].

<sup>xxx</sup> The seven novels are *Karagare Krishna*, *Mayabi Krishna*, *Krishna Abhijaan*, *Krishnar Porichay*, *Bon e Jongol e Krishna*, *Muktipothey Krishna*, *Krishnar Joyjatra*.

<sup>xxxi</sup>Prabhabati Debi Saraswati. *GraherPher*. In *Kanchenjunga Series*. Vol. 3, Deb Sahitya Kutir, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2003. [Translations are mine].

<sup>xxxii</sup> The first story of the series, "Goyenda Gondalu" came out in 1961 in *Sandesh Patrika*.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Both Mitin Maashi series and Goyenda Gargi series popularised from around 1990s.

<sup>xxxiv</sup>Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. "The Twentieth Century: Women Writing the Nation." *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present: Vol. II: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century*, edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, The Feminist Press. 1993. pp. 143-185. (access details above).

<sup>xxxv</sup>Samita Sen and Nandita Dhawan. 'Feminisms and the Politics of Gender: A History of the Indian Women's Movements.' *Mapping the Field: Gender Relations in Contemporary India*, Vol. 1, edited by Nirmala Banerjee, Samita Sen and Nandita Dhawan, Stree, 2011. pp. 1-40.



<sup>xxxvi</sup>Nirmala Banerjee, Samita Sen and Nandita Dhawan. 'Introduction.' *Mapping the Field: Gender Relations in Contemporary India*, Vol. 1, edited by Kavita Panjabi and Paramita Chakrabarti, Stree, 2011. pp.xii-xlii.

<sup>xxxvii</sup>Kavita Panjabi and Paramita Chakrabarti. 'Introduction.' *Women Contesting Culture: Changing Frames of Gender Politics in India*, edited by Kavita Panjabi and Paramita Chakrabarti, Stree, 2012. pp. xv-lxxxvi.

<sup>xxxviii</sup>Suchitra Bhattacharya. 'Introduction' to *Mitin Maashi Samagra*: Vol. 1, Ananda Publishers, 2015. [Translations are mine].

<sup>xxxix</sup>Kishwar Desai. *Witness The Night*. Harper Collins India, 2010.

<sup>xl</sup>Kalpana Swaminathan. *The Page 3 Murders*. India Ink, 2006.

<sup>xli</sup>Huzan Tata, "Author Kalpana Swaminathan on the Joys of Living with her character Lalli the detective", *Verve*, October 05, 2018. Accessed on 02/04/2020 <https://www.vervemagazine.in/arts-and-culture/author-kalpana-swaminathan-on-the-joys-of-living-with-her-character-lalli-the-detective>.

<sup>xlii</sup>Arun, Kale. "Black, White, and Grey" in *helter-skelter*, 26 June 2010. Accessed on 21 March 2020 <https://helterskelter.in/2010/06/black-white-and-grey/>.

<sup>xliii</sup>Vijaylaskhmi Harish. "From the Wordsmith's Mouth: AQ & A with Kalpana Swaminathan", *the reading desk*, July 3, 2017. Accessed on 4 March 2020. <https://thereadingdesk.wordpress.com/2017/07/03/from-the-wordsmiths-mouth-a-qa-with-kalpana-swaminathan/>.

<sup>xliv</sup>Kalpana Swaminathan. *I Never Knew It Was You*. Penguin Books, 2012.

<sup>xlv</sup>Paramita Chatterjee. "Author Kalpana Swaminathan talks about her new thriller 'Page 3 Murders'." *India Today*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2006. Accessed on 21 March 2020.

<sup>xlvi</sup><https://in.linkedin.com/in/madhumita-bhattacharyya-92090034>.

<sup>xlvii</sup>Madhumita Bhattacharya. 'The audacity of Hope'. *The Telegraph*, Oct 11, 2012 accessed on 12 May 2020 <https://www.madhubee.com/single-post/2016/08/15/15-tips-to-combat-writers-block>

<sup>xlviii</sup>Madhumita Bhattacharya. *The Masala Murder*. Pan Books, 2012.

<sup>xlix</sup>As mentioned in her Preface to the novels.

<sup>l</sup>The writers themselves are sometimes not sure of attempting a serious task using the genre's frame. Kiran Desai mentions in the 'Acknowledgement' to her first book, *WTN*, that Khushwant Singh would have preferred her debut as a writer in some other genre.

## Chapter – 4

### An unsuitable job for Indian women?

#### Indian women detectives negotiating gendered spaces

##### 4.1. Introduction

It is a truth universally acknowledged, circulated, accepted that critical assumptions, historical circumstances and ideologies have been hostile to women's literary production and have also ingenuously crippled our analytical abilities to receive and appreciate their work. The tradition of women's writing has, therefore, been difficult to discover, often submerged by the grandiloquence of discourses that have marginalised its existence by deeming it in derogatory terms. The writings which have survived the roughs of times, or more aptly, have been allowed to survive, by the patriarchal institution of production and dissemination of literature, have been those which were in tune with the dominant ideologies of the time, in which women featured mostly as a blurred background. However, since hegemony must meet dissent, since expressive forces have always been difficult to contain, appropriated or silenced altogether, women's voices have emerged from the darkest recesses of oblivion, time and again, to ruffle up the tranquillity of established canons, methods of analysing and thinking through the political economy and cultural lives of literatures.

Never was it implied that women lacked the talent to write well. What were considered as deterrents in women's writings were lack of opportunity, economic independence, status, education, time and other such external factors. However, as authoritative norms in society and literary forms dissipated enough, women found new possibilities of exploration in their writings (Carr<sup>1</sup> 123) and feminist studies delved into the impact such writings were creating in the construction of literary traditions. Women's writers, by the sixties, and even before that, in particular socio-cultural environ, were already exploring and exhibiting an impressive wave of imaginative writing where women's roles, the relationships between men and women were being questioned along with issues of colonialism, race, class, political oppression and mental illness. With a host of new writers on board and the continued inflow of writings by the already existing writers, an interesting aspect was noticed by Margaret Drabble in 1973:

“...the large amount of fiction written by women in the last decade...bears witness to the fact that a lot of women started to worry about the same things at the same time, and turned to fiction to express their anxieties” (qtd. in Carr 123).

As women’s movements demanded the constant circulation of ideas of resistance, reformulations, women writers have imbibed from these movements the necessity to recognize and articulate their own dilemmas which has in turn also voiced the dilemmas of many others. Women’s writings, being a voice from the margins, have also been conscious of the privileges of articulation through writing which is not available to all. As such, feminist criticisms in collusion with women’s writings have also tried to create avenues for articulation of suppressed voices, thus trying to create writing as a platform which could vociferously give expression to women’s concerns. Cora Kaplan has, thus, suggested that, there is a “...triangular shape of the relationship between the development of feminist criticism, feminism as a social movement and women’s writing; that is, the creative space and new renaissance of women writing” (qtd. in Carr 124). Thus, as women’s consciousness grew towards a kind of self-awareness- “what it means, what it can mean, to be a girls, a woman” (Carr 124)- in the contemporary world, women’s writings, in conjunction with feminist criticism and women’s movements, have been seen as continuously endeavoring to articulating plurality. This articulation attempts to reach out to multifarious spaces, thus emphasizing on the decentred position of feminist articulations. It has been realized that gender cannot be considered in isolation from issues related to class, race and other coordinates of social and cultural constructions. Hence, women’s texts always try to foreground the complex subjectivity of women, and project woman as a subject-in-process, always becoming (Carr 134). In fact the connection between women and writing is ideological and always political where “women’s writings remind us of our proactive energy in the face of passivity” (ibid: 134). Alison Light further points out:

“...feminist attention to women’s writing is part of feminism’s desire to achieve a more compassionate and generous understanding of human consciousness and its effects, of how political change come about, and of the extent to which the resistance of all peoples, their capacity to represent themselves is always possible” (qtd. in Carr 134).

It is interesting to note here that when feminist literary criticism tried to locate the sites of productiveness, vitality and radical potential of women’s writings, it was by

looking into the widening oeuvre of genre fiction- the romance, fantasy, family sagas, detective fictions- produced by women writers, and largely consumed by women readers that the importance of women's writing evolved not as a sub-culture or even, alternative culture, but had to be appreciated as mainstream culture.

#### 4.2. Indian women's novels shaping change

Indian novels began as an urbane phenomenon which was influenced by the colonial import of mainly British, and later on, other European and American novels. However, it was not long when novel writing in India acquired its own distinctive character, where influences of a borrowed literary form was synthesized with the indigenous aesthetics and issues to give rise to a form that responded to the growing national consciousness and its changing times<sup>ii</sup>. In the scene of avid writing by women writers during this span, besides other genres of writing that women aptly adopted to give expressions to their concerns, the genre of novel writing emerged as a potent vehicle of articulation for women writers and as a repository of ideas for the women readers.

The idea of novel writing brought with it, the notions of realism and individualism as the main ingredient of novel writing. Despite constraints, the new found social mobility conferred by industrialisation on the European man had made him realise his unique potential outside the rigidity of hierarchy so much so that he could consider the world as his stage (Mukherjee<sup>iii</sup> 6). When the idea of individualism was imported to India via English language education, it was difficult to weave it into the hierarchical, role-oriented, gendered structure of Indian society, which made it further difficult to cope with realism as mode of writing (ibid: 7). Meenakshi Mukherjee evokes Tzvetan Todorov to point out that, every genre operates in an ideological framework which suits the age (11) and also the region where it proliferates. Caught in the rapids of tensions which were, thus, generated, the writers grappled with the genre to channelize their emerging anxieties. The novel, thus, emerged as the most reliable form for capturing the shifts of time while it also negotiated with realism and individualism in its own terrain. The depiction of Indian lives in fictions, as such, continues to be challenged by the incessant incorporation of perspectives. This challenge is intensified with the growing consciousness of Indian women with respect to their changing self-perception as well as their interrogation of

gender issues. Women emerged from within the confines of the family to become both participants and agents of change in the larger society.

The story of women writing novels in India is a tale of how women found a 'voice' and how they channelised it through their creative writing. Novels have always been the vehicles by which women's evolving subjectivities and self-representations have constantly found expression in an effort to document the changing, or not-so-changing, experiences in the lives of women. Indian novels, whether in English or in regional languages, have, however, been a terrain dominated by men, so much so that the presence of women as writers have always been eclipsed in the "collective consciousness of the readers" (Kosambi<sup>iv</sup> 1), either by the overwhelming number of male writers of fictions, or the masculine ways in which the genre has been formulated, practiced and disseminated over a long period of time, as has been the case of detective fictions. It seems to be incumbent on the feminist literary critics, then, to retrieve the value of women's literary contribution, its complexities, as well as its changing dimension which might add a perspective to the ways things have been viewed.

Needless to say, writing from within social, cultural and physical confines, the dispensation of gender awareness is not possible for a majority of women writers in Indian contexts. This emerges as true when one realises how the dovetailing of colonial and nationalist agenda, and then, the blueprint of the new nation, invariably placed women at the experiment table, often appropriating women as a homogenous category to suit their agenda, and glossing over gendered significations. Thus, when women cross the threshold to come into the public sphere, to answer the call of national movement, or from a need to go beyond boundaries, it becomes inevitable that they would focus on their gendered lives, sometimes conscious and resisting the disabilities it incurred, while other times subsuming their being into the given monolithic frame of Indian womanhood. In both ways, women have addressed the immediate needs of their times, thereby, reflecting on the social, political and cultural mechanisms which have been at work in the urge to create subjects of a grander structure. However, this crossing over, for the women who moved out of the confines, either physically or creatively, also gives them wings of imagination through which they present the vision of a world of gender equality predicated upon education, employment, and legal rights. Focussed on directing attention towards social change, women writers continuously

write out of an intense urge to express an experiential reality, even while they continue to experiment with the stylistics of novel writing.

In most of the Indian languages, literary canons had been established in the early 1950s, which were then charged with constructing the imagined community of a newly independent nation and sculpting the new citizen. In such a context, a critical lens towards women's writing would lay bare the fact that in a bid to form and establish a universal dimension of literature that would present an authentically 'Indian' aspect, critics largely overlooked the changing patterns in the fabric of Indian literatures (Tharu & Lalita<sup>v</sup> 23). These changing patterns could be visualised in the fictions of time, especially the ones being written by women. There seemed to be less critical interest in delving into the truth of the novel which was seized upon by women who were making strides into the fuller participation in the public sphere, including the construction of knowledge (Bagchi<sup>vi</sup> 31). As fictions, written either in English or in other languages, contributed to a renewal of language, identity and history, fictions provided space for the production of a particular kind of truth that was accessible to the marginal or subaltern groups, such as women, a space which women writers are fathoming even today. In the process, a category 'gendered subaltern' (Kosambi 5) is created as women writers contest patriarchy, colonial racism, and orthodoxies of brahmanical patriarchy. At the heart of the novel is located the vivid imagination of the self and the society, as the novels constantly focus on reforms in women's education, livelihoods, relationships, claims to public spheres by women, questioning patriarchy from all aspects.

Again, keeping in mind the controversial figure of the woman novel-reader of the colonial times, who was much derided as novel reading by women was considered an indulgence steeped in unsanctioned enjoyment, not a widely changed reality still, novels by women have been a means of engaging with personal and individual process of self-reform, self-education and change (Bagchi 34). Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's novel, *Sultana's Dream* (published in *The Indian Ladies Magazine* in 1905), presented a feminist utopia which critiqued the patriarchal assumption of female position in society and tried to reverse the assumption by creating a world that was controlled by women while men retreated to the interiors of the house, in the *mardaana*. It may be said that, while her intention was to create a consciousness of female potential, the

novel also went on to reproduce the very hierarchies it tried to dismantle. But to imagine such a possibility of reversal within the constraints of the time is, in itself, quite a radical attempt, given the fact that novels were also being consumed by a number of women readers at that time. This makes it vividly clear that the complexities of the cultural fabric must be recognised when one tries to understand the elusive nature of identities which emerge at the margins. It becomes important to comprehend the peculiar tensions between public and private realities which underlies women's writing because for a woman writer to live in the times she does and the situations that she has to negotiate with always renders her doubly othered- as a woman and as a political subject- even in her own vision (Tharu & Lalita<sup>vii</sup> 58).

State politics highlights the need for reform by amplifying the degenerated condition of the oppressed, so much so that women's issues remain confined to ideology which does not create much scope to analyse the various dimensions of patriarchy, which constantly underwrites the consolidation of power. Women's writings, especially those which have been radical in moving beyond market demands, or those which have tried to coalesce a sense of business with a sense of resistance to ideology, have been instrumental in trying to read these strategic interests. Hence while women's writings have been negotiating with the ideological conflicts of a period, they have been extremely conscious of the workings of gendered ideology that is being constantly restructured by the social institutions and practices of the time. Thus texts and representations continue to acquire new meaning as it encounters issues and embattles forms of gendered orientation.

#### 4.2.1. Women writing gender

Following Sandra Harding's conceptualisation of gender, Ipsita Chanda<sup>viii</sup> tries to conceptualise gender at multiple levels by looking at the discursive practices of gender formation, while being aware of slippages in the way gender is conceived and gender is practiced. Expressed through the particular genre of writing, this category of gender is constructed through beliefs, reasons and emotions, from the functioning of these across geographical and social space and time. Attempting to map these interactions would result in producing glimpses of visible changes both in society's thinking processes and in its practice. The very practice of writing by women helps to develop a discourse in which women came out from the confines of their setup,

confessing their identities and establishing a public dimension of their private self. Women's writings can, therefore, be analysed as 'narratives of change' (Gavin<sup>ix</sup> 2012; Chanda 2014) in the life practices and beliefs of women as they write on issues which impact their routine lives.

Women's writings are also significantly conscious and directed towards critique, solution, explication brought about by the idea of change (Chanda xxi), which continuously affects the construction of their social identity and political subjectivity (Bannerji<sup>x</sup> 145). Diversification and convergence, contradictions and connections characterise women's writings, even when we are to examine particular genres of literature, like detective fictions in an Indian context. It may be inferred that this is so because gender and its organisation has been a practice that is performed in the daily social lives of women as they contest and comply with its contradictions, trying to inspire social reorganisation.

In this context it might be interesting to note that the second half of nineteenth century witnessed rapid changes in the urban landscape where tensions and paradoxes, unknown before, began to emerge demanding continuous attention and intervention. An 1886 article in *Bambodhini Patrika* titled, 'Streejati o Shilpakarja'<sup>xi</sup> ('Women and Art') questioned the relevance of propagating a separate curriculum for women and men where women would not be equipped with any professional training like men, but gain the basic workable knowledge of all kinds. While most reform oriented understandings of women's education at the close of the century suggested that training and knowledge for women was only to embellish themselves to better their homes or their inner selves, by 1920s women sought emancipation not only from the confines of the homes/*griha*, but also from the demands of the family which, being a patriarchal institution, legitimised the authority of a man. This authority of the man was/is legitimised not by any *shastras* but because the gender in question was/is that of a man (Chanda xxiii). This allowed them to develop a veritable critique of the gendered basis of all institutions, particularly the institutions that affected them the most. While one such concern was the institution of family, which was considered as their natural domain, the other was nation negotiating with whose standards of recognition was allowing them to emerge as political subjects. It may also be accrued to the public domain of work which continuously made them interrogate the distinctions conferred to



the understandings of public and private in women's lives. As such the dialectic that had been generated by the 'woman's question' during the colonial period of reforms, also seems to have carried itself way into the twenty-first century of economic liberalisation. What might have differed lies in the outcome of the negotiations of which women's writings provide a deferential platform. Indian women's detective fictions featuring women detectives pose themselves as critiques of these structured and constricted institutions, by attempting to intervene into this gendered genre of detective fictions, trying to negotiate and renegotiate with these intersecting categories of family, nation, work and gender which tend to define and channelize Indian women's lives conventionally.

#### 4.3. Intersectionality and its 'liberatory' potential

Amidst recent debates regarding the viability of the concept of intersectionality with respect to feminism in India<sup>xii</sup>, this theoretical stand has been allowed some purchase within this context. Associating the term to "particular histories of collective struggle" (73), Mary E. John<sup>xiii</sup> traces its legacy to 19<sup>th</sup> century, strongly emphasizing that it is not a concept which is 'new'. John argues that, intersectional does not merely mean multiplicity, which is often considered suggestive of "identities which are formed by adding together the various structures or axes that constitute them" (ibid: 73). Intersectionality professes to look into how "the simultaneous operation of structures of oppression makes these experiences qualitatively different" (ibid: 73). Often when experiences fail to be registered through recognisable or expected understandings, intersectionality provides an insight into that problem of experience itself. It defies the single axis agenda of women's movements and tries to bring to purview the understanding that could evolve out of multilayered notion of categories in order to capture the ways in which subordinated peoples have been able to make sense of their worlds, and also to fight back (ibid: 75). Hence a single axis would indeed say nothing about how a particular axis is being conceptualised until and unless that axis is considered against other structures which informs it and which it in turn advances. John muses: "If intersectionality is to have any genuinely liberatory potential it must be that it contributes to building solidarity across subjects that are recognised as otherwise getting lost between movements and agendas" (ibid: 76). Subject formation, therefore, cannot be restricted to any one dimension of the axis, but must be impacted by other

considerations without which the subjective formation will acquire a fixity that will render it ahistorical. On this pretext, the attempt in this chapter will be to analyse how the woman detective, as represented in Indian women's detective fictions, are able to register their subjective experiences through the intersection of the gendered structures of nation, family, and work which may have distinct flavours even when placed within the singular class structure of middle class urbanity.

#### 4.3.1. Across the gendered axis

Gender has been a legitimate concern around which women's movements have formulated their struggle against patriarchies which structure the social systems, while being structured, in turn. For the class, caste, religion differentiated patriarchal systems, gender seems to acquire the status of being crucial for the formation of classes and other dominant ideologies. With the constant changing and reformulation of patriarchies, and the involvement of gender and sexuality in the maintenance and reproduction of social inequality, the lives of women in India have always existed at the intersection of various coordinates of engendering inequality, especially that of class and caste (Sangari & Vaid<sup>xiv</sup> 7). Women in the already hierarchized Indian society have had to shoulder the burden of ideologies of power exhibited by colonial authorities, reformists and revivalists, a burden they continue to bear till date, although through refurbished patriarchies. The notion of plurality, as envisaged and propagated by Indian feminism, negates the practice of analysis using a singular axis. However, the proposal is to use middle class urban women subjectivity as the single point coordinator, and analyse how through empathetic interaction between the middle class urban women and different subjectivities around her vicinity, who differ with respect to class, caste, and around other coordinates, might in turn allow middle class women to be self-reflective about her positioning. This might impinge upon her categorical understanding of womanhood in general, and Indian womanhood, in particular, while also constituting variations within middle class subjectivities. This endeavour might first begin by analysing how women, especially middle class women, were constituted and themselves constitute the most impactful institutions of an Indian woman's life- nation, family and work.

The term subjectivity as used here would signify the "forms of awareness such as the sense of identity and consciousness of oneself.." (Panjabi<sup>xv</sup> 304) as it is layered

in perspectives of how one understands one's history. This unfolding of history is to take place within one's realities and how, then, the politics of reality could in turn texture standpoint and agency (ibid: 305). Subjective articulations determine the dimension of change and transformation which is, in turn, stimulated, among other aspects, by the contexts of the subjects in question. Hence the workings of subjectivity involve a "dynamic dialogism" that would not only reveal the emergence of new visions and practices, but also tensions and negotiations, especially in case of women whose subjectivity involves the gendered experiences of reality (ibid: 305). Hence such an analysis tends to project the nature of liberation as well as the limits

Middle class subjectivity seems to have been the most talked about with respect to Indian polity given its predominance in the national imaginary, which in turn provides it with unceasing opportunities for reshaping itself, thereby colouring the changing dimension of politics of the land. In fact the middle class reforms with respect to women have been intractably tied to the self-definition of class, with the new definition of the public and private spheres and with cultural nationalism (Panjabi 12). Interestingly, while women's resistance to such ideological formulation have evolved from women of all classes, it is the middle class women who have been considered as the flag bearer of women's movements. While this evokes the criticism of privileging, the question is whether middle class women have themselves been able to be aware of such privileges and have been able to break out from its constricting shackles and how.

It was the middle class which developed ideologies of a 'Hindu' and 'Indian' womanhood by counterpoising it against other classes and also the 'western' women (Sangari and Vaid12). It is through the recovery of the traditional Aryan women that the middle class families have subsumed the idea of recovering tradition that may be veritably considered Indian. This has been achieved by the selective reconstruction of scriptural evidences which has also found its way in the formation of a middle class through the logic of exclusion. The image of the Vedic women is continuously built around the notion of a distinctive difference from women of the lower class groups. This distinction is most apparent in the middle class construction of the private and the public spheres as a series of oppositions<sup>xvi</sup>. Since the middle class cultural production also seems to be tied "to its own formation within wider economic and political processes as well as with the anxieties of nationalism" (ibid: 14), the discursive idea of

the public and private spheres also impinges upon the literatures of the period, especially coming out of a middle class pen, which can be seen to have its impact to the present day.

The need for a distinct middle class culture seems to have been generated from the evolution of new economic market relations and also due to the loss of discrete caste cultures in the face of urbanisation (ibid: 14). In the drive to homogenise middle class culture, middle class women were segregated from women who belonged to the economically lower strata of society, especially in the realm of popular culture where women shared relationships with each other outside the boundaries of caste and class. In their attempt to 'modernise' patriarchy, a distinction between literary and popular genres were established while middle class women were barred from the latter as they were construed as sexual threats for women. The contention was to impose restrictions on what women could speak, write, think and read (ibid: 15). As such, the middle class public sphere held the desired versions of Indian womanhood, while the private sphere became the insulated space away from public view, a space of male authority where discontents and pluralities were considered neutralised. It is quite a contradiction that in such a constricted understanding of the private domain, the women were directed to texts and reading in order to give shape to the *bhadralok* ideal of maintaining sanctity of the private sphere by trying to improve the heart of a woman. This step opened up such avenues for middle class women which was erstwhile unimaginable, therefore, questioning the very foundation of the distinction between private and public domain, which seems to have been inspired from European modernity discourses alone, having almost nothing to do with Indian understanding of modernity. May be it is due to this that the idea of emancipation by education for women was fostered by the simultaneous opposition to the idea of creating working women, the public woman, although Indian women have always had the tradition of sharing public space with Indian men, especially when we refer to the various non-Aryan traditions which flourished alongside the hegemonic Aryan traditions. Hence it has to be admitted that caste and class definitely had a formative role to play in the creation of the consciousness of middle class women. What is proposed is that instead of making middle class women consciousness complacent within such disparities, what if the constituent differences made her more aware of such differences, so that its impact could be understood through her empathetic identification with occupants of diverse peripheral existences?

Hence instead of considering the history of women's movements as that which was about emancipation and empowerment in toto, it is important that we refurbish our claim to ponder more on the negotiations which women, here middle class women, entered into in order to determine their subjectivities. This is not to say that the achievements of women's movements within a particular historical frame is in any way less; it is the best that could be done. What stands out as probably the most important question, Sangari and Vaid ask, is how women could be 'recast' using the idea that the history of feminism and the way feminist concerns have travelled across space and time has much to do with conservative antifeminists stands that women had to constantly negotiate with, thus continuously affecting social formulation (ibid: 26). In keeping with the arguments discussed above, the research would intend to locate the middle class urban women subjectivities as may be understood by positing the women detectives within the coordinates of nation, family and work which constitute, among others, patriarchal frameworks which continuously impinge upon Indian women's perspectives of realities.

#### 4.3.1.1. Understanding nation

Tharu and Lalita refer to Ambedkar's arguments with regards to the categorization of 'nation', 'nationalism', and 'nationality' where Ambedkar considers nationality as having an elusive quality which can be understood as "subjective psychological feeling" (qtd. in Vol.2<sup>xvii</sup>, 45). He concedes that, "It is feeling of a corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those that are charged with it feel that they are kith and kin...[National feeling] is at once a fellowship for one's own...and an anti-fellowship for those who are not" (qtd. in Tharu & Lalita, vol 2, 49). Thus focussing on emotional solidarity, Ambedkar suggests, that while the making of a nation involves the shaping of self, it consequently involves the making of the Other; but again, that it is a communitarian feeling, of kith and kin. It may be inferred that this otherness is, in turn, shaped by boundaries- geographical, cultural, emotional, legal- where that which is known is also permissible and be fitting into the idea of the nation. Hence, nation continuously legitimises its presence by delegitimising the unknown, the uncontainable, and wraps within it the idea of belonging and alienation, which are further concerned with subjectivity and citizenship. Nation, thus, creates a social

imaginary through its discourses of nationalism and its cultural language which tries to suture over the gaps necessary to make this social imaginary possible.

Such a discussion inevitably brings up the issue of citizenship which, according to Krishnaraj<sup>xviii</sup>, could imply “a capacity to participate in the political and socio-economic life of the community” (43). A political community thus created is supposed to allow every member to have an equal stand in taking collective decisions that regulate social life (ibid: 43). However, what is actually noticed in practice is the constant exclusion of some members from the political community- women, migrants, ethnic groups. The presumed identity of a political community, therefore, is a contested terrain because in its idea of identification, it coerces homogeneity and enforces otherisation. In fact it creates a community of others too, whose exclusion from the political community, just as the idea of nation, may build up a community feeling of corporate sentiment of oneness- may be in this case the oneness of the excluded, the marginalised.

It has been understood that the systemic exclusion of women from the political is based on public and private divide where women are identified with the domestic sphere emphasizing their domestic role. The figure of the Vedic woman, who was evoked as the symbol of Indian womanhood, is also presented in the form of a docile, homely, intelligent woman who was the worthy companion of the Aryan man, but kept herself within permissible limits. The male dominated, patriarchal society of the Aryans, which crudely repressed voices of both non-Aryan and women of their community, was hailed as ‘tradition’ needed to be revived to regenerate the fallen present times. While this was an idea postulated by European historians to legitimise their rule over the ‘barbaric’ natives, it was also utilised by the reformists and the revivalists to produce counter arguments for the high tradition of Indian culture which should be revived and retained. In both cases women became the bone of contention, and their status as vulnerable, docile, dependent became necessary for the colonial government and the nationalists in their bid to build the ‘nation’.

The anti-imperialist hero, whom the revivalists and the reformists envisaged as the saviour of the nation, was a man who would be instrumental in the revival of traditions and who would, also, reform Indian society. This man was, however, not the ambiguous man marked out by the Indian traditions- Ram. Krishna, or those evolving

out of the Sufi and Bhakti traditions- whom the colonisers considered as ‘effeminate’, but one evolving out of the Victorian ideal of the ‘manly’ (Menon<sup>xix</sup> 6). Hence the national was built around male agency, male power and authority where male-struggles for nationhood became a point of reference, while women were othered, were confined to the status of goddess, *Bharatmata*, imagined in fetters waiting for her sons to liberate her, or the *bhadramohila*, the middle and upper class women, who were preached the gospel of upliftment by the men who categorically segregated her from the uncouth, relatively freer women of lower communities, thus breaking up the marginalised in factions. Hence women became symbols of community identity, so much so that, at times caste and religious communities became more powerful in women’s lives than gender, especially in a polarized situation (ibid: 11). When women sought freedom from such cloistered understandings of their role within the idea of nation, they realised that such liberation would be about waging war against multiple patriarchies which would, thereby, lead to multiple empowerments as well. May be, they realised that being a community of marginalised, their concerns could not be kept limited to singular identity but must go beyond that. This transcendence might go on to create feminist solidarities on grounds of empathetic identification of women’s positions which, by recognising both privileges and disadvantages, across the coordinates of class, caste, religion, would be able to unite women with an empathetic solidarity. While this idealistic position is not impossible, and may be practiced by women in their everyday life, since women are also politically subsumed within the ideologies they interrogate, a radical break free cannot be envisioned, which make contingent moments of empowerment significant.

When the *bhadralok* readership found the genre of detective fictions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they were already smarting under pressures from the colonial rule and its high mindedness. The *bhadralok* found himself cornered by the reducing possibilities of advancement through government jobs, by the constant negation of their potential on the basis of racial discrimination. Moreover Bengali masculinity had to constantly face attacks from the colonial masters for being weak, prone to diseases and cowardly. In order to overpower their subjects with a sense of the coloniser’s physical and mental superiority, the colonisers augmented a discrimination strategy based on the myth of ‘martial’ and ‘non-martial’ races (Dasgupta<sup>xx</sup>, ‘Introduction’, Vol 1). The *bhadralok*, being engrossed in nationalistic feeling by then,

did not counter such a strategy, and instead immersed himself in self-criticism and tried to devise ways by which such notions could be resisted, not by overturning them, but by substantiating them with proofs from their end (ibid:). The *bhadralok* realised that blind following of the modern, as it came from Europe, cannot be the solution, hence has to revive one's traditions, which however were laid down by indologists as 'traditions'. Besides, he concentrated on *bahubal charcha*, health accomplishments, and tried to become a health enthusiast. Even literatures hold testimony to the rise of physically, strong, disciplined, Hindu male heroes who would readily shake off physical slackness and answer to the call of the nation, the sons of the nation. It is in the character of the fictional Bengali male detective that Bengali masculinity vested its hope for release from the drudgery of government jobs, from the cloistered urban spaces, from the humiliation they had been facing from the colonial masters (Roy 28).

This dominant idea of masculinity was, in turn, spurred by the already dominant discourse of colonial masculinity which necessitated the presence of a marginalised group. The softest target for such masculinity discourse were women on whose bodies, lives, identities this form of masculinity tried to establish itself, because it is on the body of the woman that the idea of nation is inscribed. Hence while the masculinist strategy of detective fictions tried to fathom the problematics within the *bhadralok* household, it imposed the onus of the problems on deviant women, who did not follow the codes of conduct and were thus, unpalatable for the nation. The narrative disposed of them showing that such disposal was only rendered possible by the masculine detective who could contain such aberrations and also direct women to the 'right' path, wherever possible. The women readers were often warned against such transgressive characters. This warning became absolutely necessary with the rise of the 'new woman' who, due to the continuous ruffles created by the women's movements and the women writers, had become aware of her rights, was consciously developing her individuality. But the attainment of rights was only possible within a political community that ensures equal distribution of goods so that lives could be led on equal terms (Krishnaraj 44). Although in India such entitlements seemed a far cry, mobilisation towards the attainment of such rights has always been of utmost concern for women's movements which has driven women to criticise, to connect.



Women detectives, who have been focussed upon in the research constitute the middle class urban women who, by virtue of their work, have seen the murkier side of living and thus, seem conscious of their advantages and limitations. While such consciousness often tends to make them set their own perimeters, it also makes them conscious decision-makers when they must transgress the roles conventionally offered to them. The bind of a *bhadramohila* seems to be most palpable in case of Prabhabati's Krishna who, etched out in the forties-fifties, seems to find herself in a complex positioning with regards to the idea of nation. Krishna is a figure whose voice Prabhabati enthuses with rallying cries for the liberation of Indian women (*Banglar meyera*, she says, women of Bengal) from the prejudiced, cloistered life of traditions and embark upon a modernity that could ensure liberty. While it does not seem she is unaware of impossibilities, she is definitely hopeful, as women in the liberated Indian nation were hopeful. She is placed as an outsider to Bengali culture, being born and brought up in Burma, and also as an insider in her conscious efforts to resist against the internal, gendered prejudices of the culture. Of course, Krishna is imbued in the ideals of her police-officer father who cannot be patient with the idea of a meek, docile, weak Bengali woman. She is the pride of her father who entrusts her with the completion of his unfinished tasks. "Although you are a woman, I have brought you up as my son", he says (*GG<sup>xxi</sup>*, Prabhabati, 6). As an opposition to the stereotypical idea of a Bengali woman, Krishna is projected as someone who has been trained to lead a public life:

At this young age, Krishna has learnt five-seven languages, besides her mother tongue. She is not just conversant with the languages but can speak in any of these languages quite fluently. Her father has trained her as an expert horse rider; she can drive a car; she has accompanied her father to several hunting expeditions. With proper exercise, her body is well-built and strong; she has an equally resilient inner spirit (*ibid*: 9).

Before we argue that here is a reinforcing of masculine identities, Krishna is forwarded as an interesting mesh: "...she is neither like the docile, soft, calm Bengali girls of her age, nor is she like the Bengali boys of her age" (*ibid*: 8). Hence Krishna is outside the community standards and cannot be used to forward the conventional ideology of community pride. Krishna is logical, reasonable and tries to weigh every moment of her life before jumping to conclusions. However, she also has a prominent emotional side which makes her protective of her father, makes her fight with anyone

who dares to hurt Pranabesh, her maternal uncle, and later on makes her plunge into dangerous situations to help those who are distressed and violated. She sometimes loses herself in the thoughts of her dead mother, or, after leaving Burma, in the memories of a far off land. Her emotions make her strong and passionate enough to rise for causes; it also does not deter her from leading a sagacious and realistic life. Thus, in her there arises no contradiction between reason and emotion; she is a mingled mesh. Krishna portrays the notion of a female self of the changing times when women's sense of worth as individuals was strongly fashioning the ideas of freedom and justice, not just for one's own self but that which one understands as kith and kin, as community. These ideas were playing instrumental role in shaping the new narratives of the nation, of course from a different perspective altogether. The 1952 advertisement of Krishna series reads:

Every book of *Krishna* series will inspire our mothers and sisters to raise their weapons of self-defence against autocrats. If women of an independent nation continue their lives of slavery and remain dependent on others (males), instead of taking up the compass of their destiny in their hands, that will be even more shameful than womanly bashfulness itself (qtd. in Ghosh<sup>xxii</sup> 71)

This dedication is symptomatic of women being inspired to join the freedom movements with the desire to break free from both their inner and outer fetters. *HP*<sup>xxiii</sup> ends with Krishna wish to participate in uplifting the moral life of the nation, in dedicating herself to the service of the *desh*: “On that very day she informs Pranabesh that she is sufficiently educated and can deal with her life without a university degree. She said she intends to take up such work which would help general people (*shadharon er upokaar*), while making her happy” (48). Here she is definitely talking about the people of the nation which had, by then, emerged as a conspicuous category. Who are these people? It seems she could mean mostly those who may be conspicuous only as a mass, but never as individuals and hence, the powerless, faceless lot. It is also worth noting that she is associating work with service and also with her own happiness. Weren't the Bengali *chakurijibis*, service holders, looking for happiness in their work life, found the male detective fictions fulfilling their cherished dream (Dasgupta: 2016; Roy: 2017)? But Krishna does not fit into their agenda because she is a woman.

Krishna goes on her trail to avenge her parent's murder (*HP*), to bust a trafficking racket that had become notorious in her *desh* (*GP*<sup>xxiv</sup>), to defeat the wrong intentions of a powerful man and save a marginalised community (*KA*<sup>xxv</sup>). She is hailed as the pride of her community: “the woman detective of Bengal” (Prabhabati *KA* 25); a woman who did not fit into the conventional ideas of a *bhadramohila* as forwarded by the community, thus proving the very idea as variable and a construct. Yet in the advertisement to *Mayabi Krishna* it becomes imperative for Prabhabati to assert:

This genteel and respectable young girl, by the sheer dint of her presence of mind, sometimes by employing disguise...is achieving unparalleled success....Protecting herself from the grip of the autocratic, manipulative, ferocious (male) lot, keeping her womanly obligation and respect unscathed, the novel tricks she devises to defend herself and rescue the victimised women is possible only by a highly educated and well-bred woman of class and descent (qtd. in Ghosh 79)

She must be legitimised for the *bhadralok* readers who have a particular sense of Indian womanhood. She is pretty- the advertisement further claims- and it is her prettiness that makes her acceptable to all. While this statement seems to be a jolt in the feminist understanding of individuality, where it gets superimposed on the body of the woman alone, Prabhabati again invokes the traditional Hindu goddess of Shakti as being the source of power for Krishna. As the Swadeshi movement corroborated the idea of authentic Indian by structuring it around a singular, centralised identity of the essentially Hindu self as the essential Indian, women were cast into the role of translators and disseminators of this singular identity of the nation. By her name, Krishna carries within her this essentially Hindu ideal of authentic Indianness, as she has been created in the image of the mythical Draupadi, whose prowess and fiery constitution make her a formidable figure of authority, who rallied against injustices laden upon her, and for the cause of women who must bear the brunt of men's misdoings<sup>xxvi</sup>. Krishna replicates Draupadi's strength and will power in venturing into an already unjust world, to fulfil her vengeance against the disorders that personally implicate her. In *Krishna's Porichay* ('Introducing Krishna'), Krishna is drawn in the image of Draupadi when it is said that she intends to unmask all Dushyashans and bring them to justice. The dwindling stand replicates the condition of feminist consciousness which oscillates between compliance and contestation. Quite akin to the newly

emerged nation's urge to contain disobedience, revolt and resistance, she is set out with the ethical desire to strengthen the weak, wipe out the wrong. Interestingly, despite efforts to legitimise her claims to Indian womanhood by attaching her to the idea of goddess, Prabhathi does not desex Krishna, even though Krishna must always step out in the public sphere. The advertisement to *Mayabi Krishna* also reveals that Krishna is moving towards an abode of love. Krishna finds herself stunned when Raja Rao in *KA* proposes her (38). She finds herself quite attracted to this wronged man who is fighting for the pride of his community, like the freedom fighters who restored respect of the nation. Yet she does not proceed, because she chooses not to, although choices are often constrained by circumstances. She asks him, "Will you remember me?" (Prabhathi, *KA*, 100). She stands at the door as Raja Rao goes away, blending with the darkness outside (ibid: 101). She falls into the hands of the lecherous A-Chin whom she lures with her feminine coyness and dupes him to gain her freedom. A modern woman of the nation who is constantly negotiating with her life by redefining her boundaries, especially by rearranging the dichotomous terrain of the public and private sphere, Krishna constantly grapples with the idea of nation which seems to be constantly contested by the idea of the 'new woman' of the independent nation.

The constitutionally granted equality creates an inherent ambiguity about the position of women within the Indian polity where notions of the rightful place for women is often constricted within the domestic sphere, and femininity appears to be a naturally given character that literatures often echo (Krishnaraj 44). With the increasing pressures from women's rights movements and the relative awakening of women's consciousness, literatures, which are seeped into ideology, consciously or unconsciously, often suggest that familial things could be resolved outside the scrutiny of the state, mostly through the benevolence of the right thinking man (Krishnaraj 45). This path construes two major issues: firstly, the state is not made aware of its failures to guarantee equality to all and is allowed to continue with its discriminatory practices without much hassle of resistance; and secondly, the notion of 'right thinking' is hardly extended to women, thus, allowing the maintenance of status quo. In fact in the recent times the dubious stand of the state after entering into the global capitalist system has been quite problematic where it has unapologetically displayed apathy towards women's overall political participation and empowerment. It is quite impossible to exercise citizenship rights when institutional agency and access are denied. The

imagination of a nation by an excluded/marginalised category, therefore, acquires multiple distinctions.

Suchitra Bhattacharya's woman detective, Pragyaparamita, aka Mitin *maashi* (maternal aunt) negotiates with the nation's image of womanhood by striking at the dichotomous understanding of the public and private domains. Negating the constrictive idea of the private domain as domestic, for Mitin it also becomes the domain of public interactions. Suchitra wanted a woman detective who expertly manages both worlds- her private world and her public life. While the sanctity of the *griha* is well-preserved, Mitin, with her erudite mind, mobility, professional skills evolves as the ideal Hindu *ramani* that the middle class *bhadralok* would have dreamt of as an excellent companion. Mitin is also a 'new woman' who finds herself equally attached to her home and her work. While one cannot hear her rallying for women's rights, she is projected as independent in the way she chooses to deal with her life, and also as she speaks for the rights of others- the backward classes and animals in *SS*<sup>xxvii</sup>, the rights of the aged in *AH*<sup>xxviii</sup>, the rights of children in *HM*<sup>xxix</sup>. However, her independence is largely dependent on the good meaning man, Partho, her husband who is emblematic of the *bhadralok* reformer believing in companionate marriage. As such Partho accompanies Mitin on her cases as per his availability, shares Mitin's house work and parental duties when Mitin is unable to do so due to her professional engagements. Partho takes the second lead in Mitin's work, whether it is house work or professional work, as per Mitin's requirement. This condition inevitably reminds one of Punyalata's idea of modernity for Indian women where women took the decision and men supported it, where the public and private blended, where women had equal responsibility with their male counterparts to build a nation (Bagchi 79). However, the idea of *shaman dayitto*, or equal responsibility, seems to have extended itself only to the public sphere; in the private sphere it is only the *ramani's* responsibility to keep the wheels running, while men play amateurs here. Hence while the dichotomy of the spheres is criticised, there also seems to be a reassertion of the divide pertaining to women's position in them. This positioning is no doubt problematic, something with which writers continue to grapple until they decide to bring about a radical change in the structure.

A significant aspect that could be noted in case of both Mitin and Krishna is the constant reference to their nation-wide fame, and also the need for legitimisation of their skills through such an acclamation. While both women are constantly fighting against patriarchal notions pertaining to women's ability, often being delegitimised by state structures like police, there seems to be an idea of a wider nation, the people of the nation, at work here, among whom they have become quite a name, mostly as reported by newspapers which is a mass communication tool. However, this idea of people is quite amorphous; yet, it is here that the legitimisation of the woman detective seems to matter. Mitin is mostly involved in cases where people are affected within their homely circles. This focus seems to have much to do with the overall shift of focus by the feminist movements in the 1980s, when instead of the state, the family had become the site of problems. In this regard she attains the confidence of the people by entering into their domestic realms. This is quite different from Krishna who, despite intending to help those in her closed family circuit, is found to deal with larger problems in the canvas of the nation, thus, emerging as a hero of Bengal. For Mitin instances of being involved in cases of national concern are few. While in *SS* Mitin tries to stop a gang of animal poachers of international repute who kill elephants to steal ivory, in *SSP*<sup>xxx</sup> she trails a group of antique dealers who want to steal an old Buddhist manuscript. Yet the narratives continuously assert her widespread fame across regions, just it seems to legitimise her stand as a detective.

One of the interesting aspect of Mitin's cases is that most of these take us into the intricacies of communities which make India. Thus Suchitra, through Mitin, charts a historical and geographical map of India which reflects the almost invisible and forgotten shades of plurality, which is taken for granted by the homogenised concept of nation. In *AH*, a concise history about the advent of the Armenians and their contribution to the building of the nation is drawn; in *HM*, a peek into the lives of the Parsis, which are a dominant community in India, is given; in *SSP* the difficult and problematic lives of the Ladakhis is upheld, along with their association with Buddhism. Mitin can be seen criticising the nation's apathy towards its peripheries like Ladakh where people live on terms beyond that proposed by the idea of nation. Mitin and Partho narrate the story of how and why Ladakh became the 'Great Indian Silk Route' (565-567). They relate how being a land of mountain passes, ('la' means mountain pass and 'dakh' means *desh*), this land has been a land of immigrants' and

traders' which has always made the land comprise of a shifting population, never permanent settlers with definite identities. There have been a variety of people coming here who have always lived their lives through exchanges of various forms (565-567). Can such a land ever be contained within the idea homogenous idea of nation? Mitin, and even Partho, are not merely chroniclers of historical and cultural diversities, they are also commentators who ponder on the dissipating heritage of the country, on the differential treatment that certain areas have received, which tends to open up both the notion of diversity within the idea of nation, and the neglect towards that diversity because of the compulsive homogeneity of the idea of nation. This, therefore, may be seen as a conscious criticism of an urbane couple against the nation's failure to emancipate and empower epistemic communities which could, then, aim at removing marginalisation and oppression. Thus, Mitin is conspicuously aware of how the idea of nation is constantly working to marginalise a number of communities; and she constantly tries to reach out to help them, although she continuously falls within the trap that 'nation' has created for a woman belonging to her class.

In fact as feminism continues to concern itself with the rights and liberties of the marginalised, it is also continues to refurbish understandings of various class structures- including the middle class women. Under the impact of the growing awareness among middle class women regarding discrimination, disparities in the state distribution of benefits, they have become more aware of their rights and are constantly looking for avenues to assert themselves while trying to define themselves anew. Eventually, they have also become aware of their privileges which often instigate them to become self-reflective. Krishnaraj points out that in the context of aspirations and anxieties of a new middle class which is now shaping a new national subject, and under the claims forwarded by women's movements what is emergent is a right to choice for women (45). Being economically empowered she is able to voice forth her rights over her life that includes free expression of her sexuality. Interestingly the construction of the public and private spaces for women have also changed dimension where women's ubiquitous presence in the public sphere is not questioned any more, sometimes also actively sought (ibid:45). However, this also varies by class and caste divisions, where a colonial value system still tends to judge women's occupancy of the spheres. New patriarchies subsume these occupancies where the working women must fall within a double bind of the work at home, her natural work, and work outside, her work for

empowerment. The question is, how far does she achieve empowerment in such a constricted idea of being the authentic Indian woman?

As ubiquitous consciousness of deprivation continues to gain grounds, the state fails in its bid to deliver the promises, and women empowerment becomes tokenist inclusion within legislative reforms, for women the state and its demands tend to lose their legitimacy. As the state dismantles itself as a binding force from women's consciousness, a sect of new middle class women openly confront state machinery, critiquing it, while also turning inwards to look for resolution. They emerge as conscious political subjects who are able to see through the power politics of state machinery and point at the corrupt state practices which dethrones the state as a legitimising authority. Such a scenario allows them to exercise choice; but the question is where are they placed in their complete reluctance to adhere to the state's structure? They are mostly placed as outsiders, as aberrations, as exceptions.

While Swaminathan's Lalli cannot be cast within any particular community due to her refusal to use a surname, Desai's detective Simran Singh finds it impossible to attune herself to the nation's demand for a docile, meek woman upholding the traditions of her community. Her ex-boyfriend's mother is shocked, "Simran, you are a sardarni, a Sikhni, and you smoke!" (Desai, *WTN*<sup>xxxi</sup>, 4), finding it impossible to accept this whisky-swaggering, chain-smoking, khadi-clad, dark complexioned woman to be a part of the community by any standards. As these narratives are presented in first person, giving us glimpses into ups and downs in the lives of the women detectives, we barely find any need on the part of these women detectives to legitimise their claim to the nation. Constantly aware of their shifting subject-position with respect to the mirage of a unity in the form of the idea of a nation, these detectives are able to develop a critique of this category most decisively. Nation becomes a fragmented piece which cannot contain the huge diversities of the country's people and can, therefore, be side-tracked to allow people to rise individually to empowerment while imaging communities on their own.

Nation is violent in asserting its claim on its people whom it treats with immense disparity. Nation in Simran Singh stories appears dark, bleak, hostile to women who are constantly trapped within its narratives of power. Nation can no longer be understood until one recognises its intimate connection to class, caste, religion, race,



community and gender. While the huge disparity among classes has constantly led to the abuse of women, women are also constantly abused within their own classes and forced into complying with the demands of gendered roles that the nation makes on them. Hence in *WTN* the upper class and upper caste Atwals, living in small town Jullundhar are shown to be immensely abusive towards the women of their house—Ammiji, the daughters, Sharda and Durga, and daughter-in-law, Binny, for whom gendered abuse is subsumed as a part of everyday. While female foeticide, physical abuse, female infanticide, forceful confinement seem routine, the atrocities reach levels of stupendity when Sharda, the elder daughter, conceives without marriage out of love with Amarjit, a man from the lower class, and is tortured to madness within the confines of her own home and by the men of her own family. Atwals are equally abusive to women, young girls who are brought from remote, impoverished areas in Patna to become sexual slaves of their drug-addict sons. The story clearly reveals how such abuse is being practiced by upper classes with the cognizance of the corrupt machineries of the state like the police and medics, while the nation looks on without perturbation. The ideology of the nation endorses such abusive treatment towards women on whose bodies the sanctity of the community is vested. Hence the discrimination which is practiced within the four walls of the house gets easily extended to the public sphere where sexual discrimination against women is rampant. *TSOI*<sup>xxxii</sup> deals with the corrupt practices of the state which easily grant impunity to those in power, leaving those outside always in a state of precariousness. Thus while Manubhai who worked at Durga's house brought in his 'daughters' for the enjoyment of Durga's drug addict brothers (*WTN* 98), women belonging to lower class and caste in *OOL*<sup>xxxiii</sup> were treated as incubators by the surrogacy industry which paid them with money while they sold their freedom over their bodies and minds to the industry.

The idea of religion further attenuates the disruptive activities that go on in the name of nation. The powerful, rich, influential Atwals in *WTN* are known for doing a lot of charity. It is under the guise of being benevolent that they hide their atrocious criminal faces which treat women within the family as machines procreating sons. Sharda's illegitimate child, Rahul, is not killed by the Atwals because he is a boy. While he is accepted into the family, his mother is confined and systematically driven mad using electric shocks. All of this is done with immense discreetness with no resistance from the community not only because of the high status of the Atwals, but

also because Sharda emerges as the scapegoat sacrificing whom the community rises itself in morality. The amalgamation of gender and class becomes a forceful tool for marginalisation where women from both upper and lower classes are victimised, as the nation and its discourses constantly relegate them towards a cycle of vulnerability.

The idea of nation fosters division based on religious lines with so much intensity that it often convinces people of the impermeability of communities. Swaminathan's *INK*<sup>xxxiv</sup> is a story that talks of gruesome killings perpetuated by religious divides especially on women who transgress community norms for their love. Anais, Maybelle must all suffer at the hands of the people closest to them because they refused to tow the line and fell in love with men from other religious backgrounds. It is interesting how their murders are moulded in the lines of religion-based morality which is, in all its atrocity, being capitalised by a company which makes stones out of human ashes. It advertises itself as a way by which one could both get rid of those who might cause any shame to the family while also keeping them forever in the form of gemstones made from the ashes of their dead bodies. This also allows the unsympathetic termination of lives such as that of Ankush, who being a gay is a blot to the family which does not accept him. The protection that the nation continues to provide to its overtly patriarchal power structure allows little place for mercy for both women and those who live outside the normative arrangement of gender and sexuality. In *TSOI* Desai shows how Lisa, a young foreign girl is absorbed in a racket of drug and sex abuse while Vishnu, the man who wanted to help her, was harassed by police on the excuse of being a gay. The nation advocates a homogenisation of Indian identity so that those who lie outside can be easily disposed with. Moreover, it also supports homogenisation of power which concentrates within patriarchal practices that it continuously endorses. Simran confronts the dark realities that the state structure has to offer, especially with respect to the various marginalised groups which occupy it.

Such an idea of the corruption within the state structure is also focussed upon in Reema Ray mysteries where the state machinery can destabilise anyone who can be powerful enough to threaten its bizzare intoxication of power as shown in *GU*<sup>xxxv</sup>. Swaminathan deals with the intricacies of family lives in order to bring up the violent practices which are often legitimised as tradition, as religion, as belief, and most essential as projecting Indian womanhood. While Lalli is herself created with a lot of

ambiguity, she is the ‘Last Resort’ for the Mumbai detective department where she has served for thirty years. The presence of her interpretations is an unofficial presence within the official which directs attention towards both her lack of legitimate power to enforce the state machinery and also her transcendental power to uphold a critique of national standards of traditions, cultures, which Indians have so unconsciously imbibed in the course of being a part of the historical process. As such families tend to follow the trail of customs and traditions even at the face of visible violence meted out to their married daughters, as can be seen in the case of Kumudben’s niece in *TGS*<sup>xxxvi</sup> or in case of Priya in *TSG*<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Swaminathan also critiques the emerging national consciousness through activities in social media which reveals the irreplaceable patriarchal ideologies that are subsumed both within media and the people who consume news and in turn motivate its generation. Irresponsible reportage, irresponsible responses to them, glamorous activism generated through media hype often fosters crimes. This has been taken up in *GL*<sup>xxxviii</sup> which narrates the story of a Mumbai slum, Kandewadi, which becomes the epicentre of brutal killings of little six year old girls. Media reportage, feminist activist circles, social media all seem to gorge at the news to foster their own agenda instead of addressing the problem. Twitter accounts are opened to keep focus on the murders so much so that such practices add glory to the murderers who, thereby, go on a rampage. The brutality and killings become a kind of game, which is not even considered real but being played on social networking sites. Rajiv Chawla, who is involved in the murdering of these children writes in his confession statement to the police, “...I never thought those kids were real. They weren’t from good families. Their parents didn’t care if they lived or died...”, thus reflecting on disparities in humanity nurtured by power structures fostered by the growing differences among classes, where certain classes always remain invisible within the polity so that the polity may flourish (Swaminathan, *GL*, 180).

However, women detectives tend to traverse various grounds in order to bring up realities which refer to the presence of plurality within a country like India, which, in its bid to become a nation, is constantly trying to contain itself with a homogenous identity by wiping out all forms of diversity, or simply by containing it through coercion. These coercive actions of power continue while heterogeneous forces, which have always been there within the communities that make India, constantly try to assert

themselves. The problem is that such an assertion is often made within the framework of nation, knowing full well that such plurality can never be contained within its homogenous ideology. It is from here that conflicts between communities, who wish to prove themselves more national than the other, arise, simply gets attenuated by the gender question. Again, it is only through a feminist understanding of plurality, may be, that such diverseness may be acknowledged. While the idea of nation cannot be done away with in totality, the impracticality of such a framework also becomes visible to the women detectives who experience diversity routinely. As they realise that the idea of nation cannot hold good as a homogenous unit of identity, they foster a more nuanced approach towards the idea. Dwindling between contestation and compliance, the women detectives renegotiate with the idea of nation which allows them to continuously refurbish their subject positions and occupy the frame differently in accordance to their choice, thus allowing multiple points of empowerment to emerge.

#### 4.3.1.2. Understanding Family

In the context of reservation for women in rural panchayats and urban local bodies, Indira Hirway, as evoked by Janaki Nair<sup>xxxix</sup>, writes: “It is important to realise that representative participation may not lead to mass participation in our kind of socio-economic structure” (qtd. in Nair 464). Two important aspects emerge from this statement: first, visibility, which seems to be the intention of representative participation, happens in factions; it cannot be equated to change or empowerment in general (where the term empowerment basically tries to imply agency); and the second concern would be to ponder on the nature of visibility itself, and what is allowed to be visible. While talking of Indian women these ideas become quite significant as these are intricately linked to the processes of legitimising an Indian identity of womanhood which, if it does not follow a laid down trajectory, may stimulate coercion and violence. Both the ideas of visibility and empowerment for Indian women is strictly bound to the sustaining dichotomies of public and private spheres which might be interrogated, but, like the idea of nation, cannot be destabilised altogether, as it forms the basis of social, cultural and economic organisation. It is interesting that just as the idea of nation impacts the positioning of women in significant ways, the private-public dichotomy also imbricates women within its folds, and women continue to interrogate its impact and grammar in order to understand themselves and also confer meanings to

this dichotomy. However, the opposition and distinction between the two spheres of the private and public are considered as natural, trans-historical, and transcultural.

Conceptualised in connection to the relationship of the individual with the state, where the state limits its activities to the public sphere of business, economy, law, politics, it has never ventured into the private sphere which encompasses domestic domains of family which may be seen as the basis of women's subordination. In fact the private sphere has been zealously protected against encroachment by the state since the colonial times when it was conferred with spiritual attributes for uplifting the man who must venture out in the public sphere of materiality. Hence the private sphere is associated with the non-material and women are supposed to be flag bearers of this world that cleanses. This domestic sphere is considered to be the realm of women, seemingly taking cue from the appropriated version of the Vedic Aryan woman who was upheld as the model for Indian femininity, and also seems to be inspired by the Victorian ideal of 'the angel of the house'. The idea which evolved as the integrating factor of the domestic sphere was that of which women were considered the ambassador- the family.

Family is the core that sustains social order. It is considered as a given institution which is unquestionable, natural and immutable. Family, like nation, contains all forms of aberrations within its projected homogenous structure, and is designed to police digressions, and neutralise multiplicity. Family is, therefore, considered as a homogenous entity which is not only sanctioned in a certain way but also tends to process itself in a singular manner. This constricted structure of a family makes it a patriarchal, violent, compulsively heterosexual which is thoroughly based on inequality, that functions to perpetuate particular forms of private property ownership and lineage (Menon 4-6). This inequality within the family structure is certainly gendered, where women and all other marginalised categories, are thoroughly cornered in order to continuously reproduce its heterosexual, patriarchal organisation which consequently prioritises the male. It is here that the visibility of women becomes heavily constricted within the defined norms of the family which constantly operates to subordinate women in every aspect of social life.

Family is seen as a natural unit, separate from the social world which allows such ideas like 'family is the site of spiritual bonding' to germinate. In fact when the

state chooses to stay out of family, it considers it to be an apolitical space where, it is deemed, that the power equations of the public world do not apply. It is considered to be outside the material realities which, therefore, allows it to evolve as a safe, protected, peaceful space that is conducive to all round growth. This conceptualisation successfully covers up the violence and inequality which lies at the core of its gendered structure where the 'weaker' sections of society are rampantly marginalised, rendered invisible- be it women, children, elderly or disabled. In fact Rapp<sup>x1</sup> argues that it is due to a certain commitment to the ideology of family that makes people enter into relations of production and reproduction, with a tendency to create a homogenous understanding of family. It is only when feminists realised how power actually weaves into the intricate structures of the family, so that it can easily gloss over one experience to grant visibility and prominence to the other that they rallied against the unequal power structures operative within its seemingly unproblematic mould.

If one tries to understand how family emerged from within the purview of feminist understandings in the Indian context, one might have to look at the subtle divisions of the public and private spheres as it came into being during the nationalist movements. The *griha* is structured as a space which is not only ideally built for the *ramani*, but is also in turn built by the *ramani*. As this *griha* and this *ramani* meet, a certain homogenous Hindu identification of the private space and its workings generate which are definitely monolithic, which completely obscures the multiple ways in which the private space communicates within the varying grid of caste, class, religion, sex and other such coordinates. However, going back to this idea, for the sake of developing an understanding of the middle class urban woman subjectivity that this research concerns itself with, it is apt to recall that the nationalist agenda for women's reforms incorporated women's education as a means to learn the skill of managing a proper household, for producing sons to work for the nation and daughters, to carry on with the traditions of their mothers. Thus it is through women that this percolation of differential treatment based on gender was also supposed to take place. Hence the family, as the organisational unit of the domestic sphere, along with all the ideas encumbering the family, like honour, pride, respect, sense of community, all heavily loaded abstractions, were laden on women's shoulders which were further attached to her sense of morality, responsibility and her body. Thus the family became the custodian of the nation's moral health, while experiences in the family were viewed

through singular lens; any tensions that were produced were contained within the ideology of the family. As such family ideology continues to remain the most vigorous agency in creating and transmitting class and gender inequalities. Neutralising the challenges that may be confronted by the institution of family in India, it is portrayed as the egalitarian and harmonious institution that is benefitting to all. It is only when the women's movements in the late seventies tried to unpack the notion of 'family' that family emerged as the most contested site of power which could not be merely understood on terms of egalitarianism and homogeneity, and was most certainly gendered.

Detective fictions seem to attack this homogenous, benevolent ideology of the family from the very beginning when it chooses the middle and upper class homes as its site of criminal activities. Since the ones who are bound by the structure of the family are considered to share a bond based on mutual trust and commitment, the very presence of the criminal within that familial space renders that space far from being benevolent, protective or insulated from the social bargains of the larger world. Insecurities erupt and the space becomes disrupted. In fact although the detective is supposed to level out the creases and make space for order to restore, it seems the revelation of the detective creates almost permanent disruptions within families since she uncovers the disturbing truths that lay within every familial structure. She becomes the vehicle to realise how family is experienced differently by different members within the same structure. She is instrumental in exposing the internal violence that lay within the very structure of the family. However, it is interesting to note, that the very idea of woman detective cannot seem to work outside the idea of family. While the woman detective is hailed for being malleable enough to blend into other families from where secrets must be drawn, she also cannot be placed outside the idea of a family, although her negotiations with the idea may vary. While the former may be attributed to the conventional idea of women's exclusive understanding of the domestic sphere, the later becomes an essential attribute for Indian women where women cannot be pictured outside the family.

However, the detectives that this research concerns itself with- Krishna, Mitin, Simran, Lalli and Reema- can be found negotiating with their idea of family differently, which somewhat deflects from a homogenous understanding of family. For

Prabhabati's Krishna the idea of family is ambiguous. Brought up under the guardianship of a reformist father, family for Krishna has always been a space where she has been instigated to transcend the conventional barriers of being a meek, coy, timid Bengali woman and uphold herself as a woman who is potent in all affairs of the world. Family also becomes a site of violence of her when she witnesses the murder of both of her parents in the hands of Yu yin, the Burmese dacoit. Her home gets disrupted as she has to be dislocated from Burma to come and settle down in Calcutta where she is not only supposed to adjust to the cultures of the land, but also within a different familial setup in the house of her maternal uncle, Pranabesh. Orphaned but filled with the desire for revenge for the murders of her parents, she sets out on her trail for vengeance which transforms her as a human being who decides to dedicate herself to help those in need. Eventually, the needy always emerges from within the family. Krishna asserts, "...the reason for this [detective] work is to extend all possible help to those in the family in times of dire need" (Prabhabati, *KA*, 25) which points at the non-materiality of such an endeavour. Was this to legitimise the domain of public occupancy of Krishna? The advertisement attached to *Mayabi Krishna* which focuses on her identity as the respectable young girl of a descent background seems to speak volumes about the necessity to strategize this position for Krishna as someone who is seemingly within the family, yet without.

For Suchitra's Mitin, family is one of the most important factors on which Mitin's identity depends. Suchitra wanted to overturn the myth that a woman detective must be alienated from societal structures, almost in line with the experimentation pioneered by Saradindhu Bandhopadhyay in characterising Byomkesh Bakshi. Byomkesh is the quintessential Bengali *bhadralok* who is married, has Khoka, his child, and maintains a family with his income as a professional detective. But it seems that the family life for Byomkesh was created only to consolidate his *bhadralok* status as it did not impinge upon any other way in his work. For Mitin her family life is as much a part of her existence as is her work as a professional detective. Suchitra clearly indicates in her 'Introduction' to the collection of Mitin stories,

...I was not inclined to portray Mitin as a hapless, out-of-the-world brave heart; but as a modern day woman who is educated, intelligent, daring but a home maker. While, on one hand, she makes her son do the homework, on the other,



she puts the revolver in her bag and runs after miscreants and criminal with equal deftness (Suchitra, 'Introduction'<sup>xli</sup>).

In fact her home space doubles itself up as a workspace, and she meets her clients at home, and that too mostly in the presence of her husband, Partho and her niece, Tupur. Mitin is firmly embedded within the societal structure of the family and her family is created as a benevolent, supportive family which not only accompanies her on her detective trails but also work as her associate. The power structure working within the family is kept ambiguous and seems to keep shifting from Partho to Mitin. While Partho stands as an example of the modern companionate husband who is proud of his wife's potential and skill, Mitin also replicates the idea of the companionate wife who must be equally capable of maintaining her private and her public life in a steady balance. Partho and Mitin continuously critique each other and do not leave a moment to direct sarcasm or a scorn at each other, all in the spirit of humourous banter. It is interesting how Suchitra continuously points out the intricacies of family life within her racy stories of crime. This she does primarily through Mitin's continuous interactions with all the members of the family, by showing Mitin moving around the home space supervising the house maid, Bharati, parenting her four year old son, Bumbum, dusting and cleaning the house amidst attending clientele operations. Besides this, the stories continuously speak of different kinds of food, mostly the variety available in Calcutta, which not only consolidates the quintessential idea of a Bengali's love for food, it also tries to create a sense of realistic living and family bonding over food. Mitin is hardly seen transgressing family norms for her work, as she is placed within a cooperating family structure, which does not require her to transgress norms. Her engagement with her work is accommodated by her family which does not impinge on her work necessarily. Bhattacharya while trying to neutralise power equations that works within the structure of a family, create Mitin with a ambiguity where her priority keeps shifting from family to work, from work to family, depending on the circumstances. It is this ambiguity of positioning that makes her evolve as a 'new woman'.

Mitin's family also serves as a foil to the disruptive family structures, where disruptions mostly surface due to her intervention. The crimes which are brought to her mostly happen within the vicinity of trust and faith that ultimately loses grounds when it is revealed that they are misplaced and have been thoroughly violated, especially

within the closeness of family. In *JB*<sup>xlii</sup> Jonathan, while handing over the cheque to Mitin for her services, which included demasking the evil intentions of Jonathan's children, son-in-law and his housemaid besides solving the mystery of the ghost in the colonial mansion, tells Mitin, "...consider this as gratitude for unmasking the true nature of the ones close to me" (224). In *AH* when Mitin reveals how Isabel, the old lady who was mourning the loss of her son, was being slowly poison by mercury mixed in the wax of the candles made by her niece, Jasmine, Mitin ends the story with a rhetorical question, "...This was a blow to Isabel aunty's faith on Jasmine. Will she be able to trust Jasmine ever again?" (72). However, at the end Mitin is also seen as trying to salvage moments of life and happiness from the debris thus created. While there is a mechanical shift from the sad realities of family lives to work-at-hand- like asking Tupur to go home to finish her homework before the school reopens in *JB* (225), she also allows her family into the sites of pain and hurt. In *HM* after Mitin is able to find the kidnappers of the son of a wealthy carpenter merchant of Calcutta, Rustamji, she takes her son Bumbum to play with Rony who has been traumatised by the whole affair- "...only a child can understand another child's mind", the narrative voice asserts (225). Thus she seems to epitomise the woman who carries out her work in the public sphere without disturbing the equanimity of her private sphere, thus attaining a perfect, inspiring, though unrealistic work-life balance, which instead of rejecting the institution of the family, ekes out ways of making it thoroughly workable. However, one cannot simply miss the class, caste, religion, locational angle in this entire picture which constantly seems to gloss over the gendered working of the family. Mitin is seen almost sailing through the family structure and balancing the domains of public and private lives with super heroic dexterity. Yet, she too presents a perspective of how the middle class urban women might negotiate with her idea of family where she flexes rules according to her requirements.

Krishna's cases, despite professing to address the need of family members, are rarely woven around family problems. These stories mostly address the larger cause of the nation, given the post-independence period in which they were composed, when women were trying to fathom their roles in the new nation. The disruption within the family is mostly submerged within the conventional discourses of family pride and honour. However, since the stories proclaim to suffuse women with courage to face these patriarchal structures, these are few stories which speak of disruptive families,

besides Krishna's own family. In *KA*, after Krishna has killed Rajendra Prasad, the culprit who has illegitimately taken the prized possession of the *mangal chakra* of Raja Rao's community, in a fiasco that occurred in Rajendra Prasad's house, Krishna goes to meet Rajendra's bereaved wife. Sandhya, the wife, narrates the culpability of her husband as someone who tried to slow poison her father, hold her captive when she protested and was responsible for the death of her two year old son held in captivity in unhealthy conditions (98). However, she cries because her husband has been unable to live upto his promise; she cries at the demise of her sinful husband, unable to completely abandon the latter although she feels betrayed. In *KK*<sup>xliii</sup>, in the character of Sumiya, Prabhavati presents an ideal wife who associates herself with all good and evil jobs of the terrorist, A- Chin, and saves his life by forcing him to escape, leaving her behind as she was fatally ill. In order to suppress all news about her husband from the authorities, she poisons herself to ensure her husband's safety (134-135). Both women project the image of ideal womanhood while they are also conscious of its complexities. Krishna pities these women, as their pain is not just because of their choices, their choices were constrained by societal structures that define family which brings about their doom. She empathises with them, a connection that is built through a shared understanding of pain and hurt. However, Krishna does not settle down within the structure of a family till the end. While this apathy may be related to women's new found sense of individualism and self-dependence within the structure of the independent nation, it may also point at an escape from the unequal and gendered power structure that creates the family, of which Krishna's experiences make her quite aware. She is hardly seen within her domestic sphere, except for the beginning of the stories where her domestic life mainly comprises of her conversation with her uncle, Pranabesh, and the preparations to venture out for solving a case.

While experiences of a family is as varied as the members who inhabit the space, family is generally considered as a private refuge from an increasingly impersonal public world. Since public laws are not always obliged to interfere into family affairs, thus, ignoring domestic neglect, violence, physical isolation of women and children within the home structure, the burden to survive within such inequalities is not just laden upon women but they are also trained by the family to bear the pain and deprivation and acquire the quality of self-denial. The notions of tolerance and self-restraint seem to be rooted in a consciously cultivated feminine role which the ideology

of the family expects. Thus, most Indian women are socialised into subordination in a way that affects their lives in a never ending cycle.

The son preference which is ingrained within Indian families which are largely patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal, dominate women and young girls to the extent that they grow up with a notion of temporary and secondary membership within their natal homes. While nursery rhymes, lullabies, mythical stories, fairy tales on which young girls feed and grow up constantly prepare them for the inevitability of marriage as an important event in their lives, these also tend to shape their ideologies of perfection through fair, thin, rich, loving, giving, accomplished Barbie-like role models who are constantly in need of a man to legitimise their position in society. Hence girls grow up to accept that subordinated position and also the need for a heterosexual family life where they can be the princesses who manage it all. While this could very well be relatable for a young girl growing up within an urban, middle class setting, in other settings such practices may have different dimensions, but these exist. Any aberration in the structured flow of the family is meted out with immense violence, which is characterised as a blow to the honour, prestige of the family or community, of which women are the most significant bearers. Doesn't this also imply that the so-called strong, uniform structure of the family is inherently suspicious of its own stand, insecure enough to become repressive, and also unable to contain the fissures which keep emerging from within its surface normalcy, thus overturning the idea of a family as a homogenous unit to a myth?

Kishwar Desai's novel *WTN* presents an epitome of a patriarchal family exemplified by the Atwals in the small town of Jullundhur in Punjab. While son preference leads them to repetitive female foeticide and female infanticide without any qualms, they treat the girls, Sharda and Durga, with utter contempt. Durga is considered as the 'kaala teeka' (35), the dishonour of the family because of her unremarkable appearance and dark skin which is supposed to make her unfit for the marriage market eventually. A site of brutal torture- from wife battering to harbouring sex slaves from far off obscure villages for their sons- the Atwal family presents a perfect picture of a patriarchal family. But seething differences are breeding within the family. Sharda and Durga continue to threaten the coercion of their family by being rebels. Sharda falls in love with a man outside her community and status, gets pregnant and Durga supports

her with all her might: “I didn’t think she [Sharda] was bad, she had fallen in love and there seemed nothing wrong with that. Why couldn’t my parents or my brother accept her the way she was?” (112). When they find little skeletons buried in the fields adjoining their house, they realise how these could be the daughters who were never allowed to live. They were both stubborn and would not die, and had forced all to allow them to live: “Somehow its[skeleton’s] determination not to disintegrate into the earth seemed linked to my own survival” (156). The sisters survived on portions that were left aside for them; they sustained that with courage. When the Atwals tried to force their daughter-in-law Binny to abort the female child who was growing inside her, Durga, putting her life at stake, planned and executed Binny’s escape along with Rahul, Sharda’s son. The defiance, the lovelessness, the torture which increases in measures with every passing day ultimately makes her easy prey for Harpreet sir, Ramnath and others. She is to be proved insane so that her property may be taken over. Durga realises her quest for love within close circuit has made her blind to the schemes of the people around her. However, she decides to give in to these scheming people in order to be close to her sister, her love. The institution of family, is constantly attacked as the violence which is interred within family structures are brought to the fore.

While *WTN* projects a grim picture of one facet of a patriarchal family, *OOL* projects another ideology of a heterosexual family which depends on the reproduction of an offspring. This idea of motherhood often goes beyond the emotional bonding of the mother and the child and is reduced to the idea of women being considered mechanically as incubators. While marriage is considered as the legal institution that could foster the growth of families, motherhood is considered as a natural desire for women, and the inability to conceive, a disgrace which women must pay for by being constantly shamed by society, including her family. Science appears to be quite a patriarchal institution when it endorses such gendered treatment towards women by advocating advanced techniques of reproduction like in-vitro fertilisation, surrogacy and sex determination which can be immensely painful and life-taking for women. These advanced techniques can, by no means, be seen as empowering women since their agency in such cases range from minimal to absent. It is the ideology of family which is so subsumed within women that it makes it impossible for them to resist its impact on their minds, bodies and social interactions. Desai’s *OOL* complicates idea of a child fulfilling the family picture further when it reveals how the booming surrogacy

industry captures hapless women like Preeti and Sonia into the business by putting her body, freedom and even, her life at stake for money. However, these women, already living in the precarity of poverty, take such risks in order to provide for their families. Ben and Kate are presented as a couple from abroad who have been constantly hoping for a baby, especially because of Kate's wish to become a mother and her repetitive failures to be one. When they hired the services of the surrogacy industry in India, Ben, who was always against the madness of having a baby as a mark of fulfilment, goes to Dehradun to look for the ancestral house of his grandfather who, according to his family gossip, had left behind a woman whom he loved and who had borne him children- the classic situation of the white man's illegitimate relationship with the brown girl. While Ben could trace the house and also the person who seemed to carry his family genes, now impoverished with three children, he could not adopt any of them against Kate's wish, who wanted her own baby to fulfil her dreams of a perfect family. Subhash, the doctor who runs the clinic, finds it difficult to accept the idea of a gay couple, Ludi and Nicholas, as being 'family' to a child. The Hindu right wing fundamentalists severely demonstrate against this gay couple having a child which is only quelled through bribery and political intervention. As 'family' varies in forms, so does its coercive systems; what remains a constant is its patriarchal nature and also its fissures which cannot be contained, thus, making it extremely complex.

Quite in contrast to Mitin, Desai's detective Simran is not representative of an ideal family, because she refuses being enmeshed within the conventional ideas of a family. At forty, she walks in and out of relationships that do not suit her independent and scrutinising being. She might be seen ruminating over her lost chances of being in her lover's arms, but that rumination is more infused with scorn than regret towards the patriarchal mindset of Indian men whom she finds difficult to adjust to. Her mother pesters her with marriage, because she wants grandchildren and therefore, brightens up at the advent of any man into Simran's life. It seems that the scathing criticism towards the unequal, gendered and violent structures that feminist movements launched against the family makes it very difficult to imagine a juxtaposition of women's independence within the unchanging patriarchal nature of a familial set up. Simran presents a new understanding of family when she adopts Durga as her daughter, and commits to take care of Sharda while finding herself increasingly attached to anyone who is bereaved of love from dear ones. Thus despite standing outside the conventional family structure,

Simran is unable to shove it aside altogether and renders it with a meaning on her own. She might be discerned as privileged by class, caste and status to allow her to choose, but it also must be remembered that she stands at the periphery still and remains an aberration.

For Madhumita's Reema Ray, family is a disrupted setup with divorced parents who have not made her childhood easy. She turned to detective fictions in order to comfort herself with the fictions' potential to resolve all problems at the end. While she places herself outside the family unit, deliberately staying away from her parents, looking for viable options for jobs and earnings to make her own living, she appears to be quite unconfident about herself, mostly about her appearance to begin with. She is unable to consider herself with regard until she gets the job at Titanium, the largest corporate detective agency in the country, yet finds herself extremely jealous of Shayak's beautiful ex-wife, Simaya, whom she meets during a case. She is often unable to maintain a professional and personal distinction of spheres despite insisting on maintaining the distinction. While being led into the already disrupted lives of her clientele she is able to relate to such disruptions since she carries them as her childhood memories which tend to leave its imprint on her personality all the same. However, she looks for an outlet- her dwindling relationship with Shayak, her boss, may be seen as her way of trying to look for avenues to suture the gaps that a sense of insecurity of the family has left in her.

Swaminathan's Lalli stories can be considered as meditations on the nature of Indian families as Swaminathan juxtaposes various strands that may be visible within an Indian family, thus completely disrupting the notion of family as a site of homogeneity. Family, in her works, is an experience that is subjective of the members and their consequent position within the family structure. Lalli and Sita live within the relationship of aunt and niece without any definable familial past of descent that such relationships tend to adhere to. They grow into this relationship by mostly staying out of each other's ways although they always have each other's back. Like the surnames of both, Lalli's life, which is presented through a first person perspective of Sita, remains elusive with no mention of a family or children; interestingly the stories till date have not tried to fathom the depths of this mystery although Swaminathan intends to plunge into it soon. Family for Lalli, therefore, eludes the conventional definition

and comprises of Savio, Dr. Q, Inspector Shukla who form her team not just for work, but, through a sense of mutual dependence, for life. Thus her family comprises of characters which come to her life and do not leave, and as such are recurrent in the novels. Besides the work that binds her to these people, there is an unavoidable presence of remarkable food served “across the dining table, and good, delicious food is often near at hand, for nutrition as well as solace — “a cup of jeerarasam, argumentative with pepper and garlic, with a curry leaf crisped in ghee” (Mukherjee<sup>xliv</sup> 1) which indeed go on to create a sense of family beyond the familiar, which stays on but does not impinge upon the lives of its constituent relationships.

However, the cases in which she gets involved present the complex structures of Indian families where the marginalised must bear the cudgels of the sanctity of the institution. The complex plot of *INK* brings together coordinates of caste, class, religion to show how the idea of family is so interred within these coordinates that it is almost difficult to expunge such ideologies even from within the most ‘modern’ mindsets. When Maybelle falls in love with Aaftab, her family disapproves of this interreligious relationship to the extent that Maybelle’s sister, Lucy, is killed by the family members to hide a dark family secret. The secret is related to Maybelle’s disappearance from the public domain and an uncertainty hovering over her presence. Lalli discovers Maybelle in an anteroom across the dark corridors of kitchen in the Pereira house in an indescribable condition of horror. The Pereiras having no inkling of the crime they committed continuously retorted, “We took good care of her” (166) while they assembled all proofs to project her as mad. A woman who threatens the sanctity of a family and a community must be punished for her disobedience, and must be insane. Maybelle is punished, and so is Anais, Aaftab’s niece, who marries a Christian man. Since both of these women are sores for their communities they are taken care of by the intrusion of the ‘Rassiwala’, a murderer who uses a pink nylon wire to suffocate the victims. Lalli, who had been on the trail of the ‘Rassiwala’ since many years now, having utterly failed to reach the depths of this mystery, finds that the Rassiwala is simply a voice over the phone that settles embarrassments which are mostly in the form of transgressing women. Faceless, this voice plays over insecurities lying deep within people’s minds, mostly those related to transgressions of conventions. The ‘Rassiwala’ then becomes a metaphor of the coercive force which operates within the family, the



community to neutralise tensions that might threaten its seemingly naturalised, homogenous structure.

In *TSG* the family becomes a site of violence which is perpetrated on the 'weak' - the woman and the child. A victim of domestic violence and marital rape, Priya seems to have internalised the wound as part of her existence, directing her sympathy towards the perpetrator of violence as an excuse to silently live on with it. This mode of self-denial seems to consolidate its hold at the face of denial of support from her natal family who force her to believe she can and she should adjust to the inhuman torture laden upon her by her husband, from which she is finally relieved only when he dies. In the course, she becomes a victim showing classic signs of abuse to the extent that she is unable to protect her child from such perpetuation of violence by her own parents. She is also not able to trust Arun, her second husband, who dearly loves her and her child, Jai. The lack of support from her own family against the violence she had to endure makes her a complaint victim. When strangers kidnap her and rape her, she is unable to raise her voice against those atrocities as her voice for help has always been subdued by her parents. While *TGS* is also full instances where women have had to endure domestic violence within the families they have been married to, mostly because their natal families did not support them out of fear of community shaming, *MM* presents the picture of the violated husband who must bear the insanities of his delusional wife who wants to make him pass as a serial killer.

Family is an institution that tries to make all aberrations, disruptions, and the marginalised invisible. It is a patriarchal institution that thrives on the notions of inequality and perpetuates it in all forms, mostly it seems, because it cannot help. Had a family been a democratic space, trying to observe constitutional rights of freedom, equality, it would not have existed. What is, therefore, problematic is the homogenous understanding of an Indian family which tries to force itself into existence within the multiplicities that define Indian lives. Hence while the relatively undisturbed families of the middle class urban women detectives are pitted against the variously disrupted family structures of the characters around whom the stories of crime and violence revolve, it is interesting to note how family for them defines their subjective positioning within societies, as they also engage in experiencing and putting together their individual understandings of family through these encounters. They realise how

there cannot be a monolithic way to comprehend family which also allows them to look into the surface realities of coercion and abuse which exist within familial structures. Not only are they able to reveal the hidden workings of this gendered, oppressive structures, the women detectives are also able to reach out to those who lie at the periphery of the patriarchal family structure, tortured by the insecurity of being at the margins. Hence we can find the women detectives either speaking for those who have no voice or stimulating victims to raise their voices. But they hardly lose hope; their families, in the varieties that they experience them, come up as restorative of calmness-family as haven, if not of order, but of a little chaos.

#### 4.3.1.3. Understanding Work

Having intricate links with the idea of family is the idea of sexual division of labour where women's work is constricted within the domains of housework, that is, in the reproduction of labour power which goes into making other members of the family capable of doing their work (Menon 11). Domestic work is considered to be women's primary responsibility even when they are performing labour outside home, and consequently contributing to the economic growth of the nation (ibid: 11). Thus the work at home tends to remain invisible because a secondary status is accorded to this prefatory task which had lost its significance with the advent of colonial modernity. As colonial modernity transformed the basis of Indian economy from agriculture to industry, it affected women land owners severely. While women could hardly find any space within the new structures of economy, they slowly lost grounds and were relegated to positions of insecurity. Moreover the traditional agricultural knowledge like those pertaining to seed retaining, seed distribution were slowly lost due to misuse. Women found it impossible to incorporate within the new economic structures because of their already precarious positions which were further attenuated by gender and class. The domestic sphere into which women were, thus, forced to retire came to be associated with work which was severely devalued. The only visible form of work left for women to do, was reproduction and the consequent nurturing, caring of children, aged, besides other family members.

With the urgency among the nationalists to uplift the condition of women, came the need to educate them. The targets of this educational reform were mainly the women of the upper and middle classes who would then become the ideal

*bhadramohila*, a companionate wife to her husband, and also remain distinct from the women of the lower classes. The women from the lower classes, despite suffering within their own class conditions, exhibited more freedom and mobility than those of the higher classes, who had to remain within the strict constriction of the private space. In fact the education that women were supposed to receive was also to embellish them with the knowledge of improving the domestic circumstances, and of bringing up ideal sons for the nation. The idea that education would allow the flourishing of free individual was thwarted by the subordination of women within the domestic sphere. As nationalist ideology attached spiritual values to the domestic sphere, women were burdened with the custody of its upkeep. The material sphere of the public world, with its complexities, was considered as a male domain which was unsuitable for women because its peculiarities rendered women vulnerable. The women who occupied the public domain were easily disposable and were categorised as either transgressive women who crossed boundaries, or women of lower classes who were mostly poor. Since women were considered as custodians of the community, their moves were always scrutinised, and measures were taken for its rectification. It was maintained that the cause of this relegation of women to the security of private spaces had much to do with the protection of Indian women from the defilement engendered by the outsiders' attacks, especially that of the Muslims. Thus, the inner private safe was projected as safe, and also attached to ideas of dignity, respect for women while the public spaces were pictured as exposing them to danger, shame, exploitable weakness and vulnerability and prone to male attack (Natarajan<sup>xlv</sup> x).

In this dichotomous understanding, the private sphere appears good and the public sphere, bad for women. Thus women's occupancy of the public sphere is either completely constricted or limited to such interactions where women would be aware of their limitations which are determined by the forces that control the private domain, especially that of community and family, the two interlocked structures of patriarchy. While honour becomes the most important deterrent to the participation of women in the public sphere, an understanding that women, being occupants of the private sphere, are apolitical beings also makes their public intervention unseriousness. Since family is considered to be a sanctimonious space which is, supposedly, undefiled from the materialistic realities of the outside, and is to be zealously kept that away from scorchers, the space is built as a monolithic space with positivist ideologies. Any

aberration there is considered a digression that should be contained. It is interesting to note in this regard, that this idiom of loss which is associated with women's participation in the public sphere also brings with it a certain form of freedom that allows women to move out. Related to the brutalities laden on women during Partition, the exclusion and violence they had to face within and outside their own communities brought with it a sense of loss, which in turn allowed them to rise above their precarity and engage in work in the public sphere by which they could earn their living, thus initiating the emergence of middle class working women (Panjabi & Chakravarti li). One of the unexpected outcome of Partition, therefore, is that it opened avenues for women's self-realisation: "Women talked of 'developing wings' in the paradoxically new found freedom in the midst of crisis and dislocation, testifying to the transformation of the refugee into self-made woman" (Panjabi & Chakravarti li); although this freedom can be dovetailed with the idiom of loss.

The idea of a woman detective is quite a jolt in such prevailing ideologies. More so, when it necessitates the woman to occupy the public space, which is not considered her natural domain, under the full support of the narrative framework. She can no longer be considered a transgressive woman with material knowledge of the world as this alone makes her potent enough to be a detective. She must brush her shoulders with violence every day. It seems to be a challenge for the writers to create a convincing public presence of the woman detective in public domain; the trick seems to lie in the balancing act. By the time Prabhabati conceived her detective, feminist explorations had shattered quite a number of myths regarding women, while putting forth valid interrogations with aspects related to women's life and also women's actual sphere of work. When women stepped out from their constricted domain to answer the call of the nation, it was a move that they were taking towards paving the paths of their own freedom. However, the tendency of the nation to formulate homogenous subjects and contain all forms of resistances also continued to keep women entangled within the problematic dichotomy of the public and the private sphere. Their movements were criticised, stunted, scrutinised and were often dismissed. One of the most permissible work for women in public domain was to work of the nation, 'desher kaj', where the idea of working for the greater good of the community was emphasized, it seems, in order to balance women's desire to work in the public sphere and the conditions of occupying the public sphere as is laden upon women. Women's incorporation into the

public domain was, thus, more directed towards the service sectors- mainly nursing, teaching, office jobs- which would allow them to strike a balance between the demands of the public and private lives. When Krishna expresses her desire to continue with the work of a detective in future, her intention is not only to work for the community, but also towards her own happiness (*HP*). The narrative structure incorporates a number of male and female characters who constantly express their disbelief at Krishna's choice of her work, often coaxing her to realise that it is an unsuitable job for a woman. The police detective, ironically named Byomkesh in the Krishna stories, is always driven by the inclination to prove Krishna wrong and make her aware of her limitations. But Krishna continues to surprise him, even by saving the lives of his men and him (*GP*). In *KK*, the dacoit A-Chin expresses his desire to marry Krishna because he thinks Krishna to be his equal in adventurous spirit because of her exploits as a detective. Had he been a saint, Krishna would have to be a "*pardanashin*, coy, simple Bengali girl who would be ending up in kitchen work instead of being a detective" (93). Thus Krishna cannot be placed within the criteria of a conventional Bengali woman as what she is doing as a detective is unusual by such standards. While this might seem to be eulogistic, it also places a working woman like Krishna outside the parameters of an ordinary woman mainly because of the kind of work she is engaged in which continuously requires the toppling of the public and private dichotomy. Often in Krishna's voice Prabhavati puts the rallying cry for women's emancipation. Often when Krishna is reminded that being a woman she has her own limitations, she vehemently asserts:

Women are humans too, *meshomashai!* I only want to prove that if women receive the same kind of education as that of men, they too can achieve wonders. Women have remained in the darkness of being backward for a long time. I only want to let them know, now it's time for them to move forward, to work. Let women move forward, let them make their strength and courage evident (*GP*, 24).

Krishna can, thus, be seen venturing into danger without any second thought, with the intent to help those in danger foremost on her mind. She is trapped by the villain in most of the stories, but she emerges victorious, freeing herself and others with her sagacity, patience and courage. Prabhavati's presentation of Krishna is compulsively that of a woman who falters, steadies herself, admires someone like Raja Rao who is fighting for his community and offers to marry her (*KA*), and can also play

coy to dupe the miscreant A-Chin (*KK*). Prabhabati, therefore, does not desex Krishna's presence in the public sphere. Amidst such motivation, we can also find Krishna being conscious of her limitations. In *GP*, when school-going boy Dedu asks her to join his friends and him for a picnic as she is not any conventional girl and can enjoy being there, Krishna draws the line: "...for work I can always mix with a lot of people, but that is not possible in recreation" (3). These dwindling dimensions make Krishna's character stand at the threshold of public and private dichotomy, making her aware of both her limitations, and thereby, her capabilities.

In contemporary times women's occupancy of the public space is ubiquitously visible. But does this visibility confer women with the desired freedom? In the sphere of work women are no longer constrained by the choices available for work, but they are of course constrained by judgements. Needless to say these gendered judgements are always directed to the idea that women's presence in the public sphere and their increasing engagements with it often make their private spheres suffer, which is equated with violation of women's natural role. Thus women, mostly, tend to get into the balancing act which leaves them very little time for the self. With the increasing economic stability of women, especially middle class women, women are now able to relegate the house work to women belonging to lower classes. Interestingly, such relegation does not free women from the responsibility of house work but rather consolidates the notion that the domestic sphere is the sphere of women, whosoever may accomplish it. In the public domain women are accepted as long as they fit within the patriarchal understandings of women's work in the public sphere which inevitably considers women to be a woman first, and a worker later. This is what leads to the gendered aspect of women's work which cannot still be countered.

Suchitra's purpose in creating Mitin was to overturn the idea that women need not be oblivious of her private domain in order to accomplish her public roles. Mitin is seen to balance both her sphere with equal deftness. Her home is the place from where she operates as a detective. Her investigative agency, 'Third Eye', is nothing but a balcony at the back of her house which she has covered up in order to make it an operative space, where she can retire for complete silence in order to dwell on the cases. Mitin's professionalism lies in the way she deals with the cases, planning its execution with deftness, taking decisions, asking for assistance, and of course,

managing her finances, and her professional ethics. Partho, Mitin's husband, is always anxious about what he considers to be Mitin's non-material attitude as Mitin can hardly be seen quoting her fees. She never mentions about money to her clients and is mostly seen to rely on their discretion for a fees. While this annoys Partho to no end, for Mitin it is the potentiality of the case that she weighs before taking it up. However, her upper class, and often, elite clientele never quite disappoint her and she is seen carrying away a good amount at the end of the case. This sort of exchange is not present in the Krishna stories as Prabhavati could not make her a professional detective, but made her work for the needful within her family. She had to be appeased either by non-material gifts like *aashirwaad*, fame, confidence of people, sometimes gifts; an economical exchange was not in the picture. While this could be analysed as the impossibility of picturing a woman detective as a professional who earned her living by the job (although Byomkesh had already paved the way for the professional detective, by then), it also points at the prejudices that were strong about women's occupancy of the public sphere of work, and could not be toppled so easily.

Does this mean that while creating Mitin, Suchitra was able to overcome all constrictions? After receiving a cheque of twenty five thousand for solving the mystery that had engulfed the life of Jonathan, Partho suggests: "We must immediately go to Shiraaz and have two plates of delicious biriyaani" (*JB* 226). When Mitin receives a cheque of five lakh rupees for bringing back the kidnapped son of the elite carpet merchant Rustamji, Partho is quick to suggest a continental tour during pujo would be the most deserving way to spend it (*HM* 226). A middle class woman's income is always a surplus. Never in any of the stories is there any mention of Mitin improving her lifestyle. Since her income is intermittent she is often, quite jovially, made aware of her unsteady income as a detective by Partho, although Mitin seems unperturbed by it. One can contrast such similar situations with Byomkesh or even, Sherlock Holmes when lack of cases not just worried them of an unadventurous life, but also a declining stash.

It is important to note that Mitin also has a retinue of women substituting for her when she has to engage in her work. Bharati, the maid and Saheli, Mitin's sister, often share her domestic and caring responsibilities when she must give away her time for her work entirely; Partho does this caring and domestic task amateurishly, that too only

when he is available from his work at his printing press. The heroic image of Mitin that Suchitra portrays so deftly seems to raise questions when one notices the sutures that has to be filled to make Mitin a professional detective. She definitely epitomises the urban, middle class women in this respect who are forced walk down the trapeze line every day, balancing their worlds. But Mitin does all of this with a sense of freedom, claiming her way into the public sphere, trying to look at the dichotomy in less gendered ways.

As women constantly battle the prejudices of the public world and assert their rightful claim into that sphere of visibility, Simran, Lalli, Reema and Mitin are not seen asserting the claims of women to occupy public sphere or to make the world realise how women are being ill-treated, like Krishna did. This may be due to the fact that women's movements and the critical feminist studies had already made the differential and gendered treatment against women quite lucid. These women simply allowed themselves to be a part of the sphere of work which did not only mean service to nation but service to themselves. Reema is constantly seen negotiating deals with her clients who come to her with petty cases of spouse betrayal, until she is taken in by the lucrative offer made by the largest detective agency in the country, Titanium, after she deftly resolves a case. She has university degrees in criminal psychology and other skills useful for pursuing her career as a detective, although she also learns from the field. She is seen undergoing rigorous training to become an underground agent, a task she accomplishes with aplomb. The three novels in the series might be considered as tracing Reema's onward journey to become a detective, which also allows her to discover herself, almost in the tradition of a bildungsroman. As she gathers more confidence and more courage as a detective, she is also seen constantly dwindling in one aspect, her love life. This separation of the personal from the professional is what continues to create instability in her, or may be, it allows her moments of self-introspection, which in turn allows her to grow.

Simraan is outright emotional, with no proper pattern in her work as a detective, except her sharp mind putting the clues together, her courage helping her to face every possible danger, and her passion for the truth making her stride forward towards every difficulty. She is contemptuously called a '*NGO-wali*' which consequently makes her occupying the public sphere a matter of whim. However, she is often summoned by the



police and friends to help them solve complicated mysteries. While solving these mysteries she is often found to be entangled within the nitty-gritties of the problems which make it impossible for her to separate the emotional from the professional. She is able to become one with the wronged, and uses her intuition mainly to resolve the problems. One of the most important aspects that a woman detective seems to use as her tool is her easy entry into the domestic sphere by virtue of being a woman. Moreover she often raises less suspicion in the minds of others while she is on her detective trail, because mostly women are still not considered to have the potential to deal with crime and criminals, and leave alone be a detective.

Lalli looks absolutely unconvincing as a detective. At sixty three, she is a retired police officer who is still called “L.R. Lalli” meaning ‘Last Resort’ for the police department in Mumbai (Swaminathan, *P3M<sup>xlvi</sup>*, 10). However, in Sita’s words: “She [Lalli] isn’t my idea of a policewoman, or even a hotshot detective squinting at bloodstains” (ibid: 7), which completely makes her invisible as a detective. Thus, while being a shrewd, intelligent, rational, courageous detective, who also has a MD in pathology, Lalli can very easily be camouflaged by conventional prejudices that allow her to carry on with her task, silently overturning those very constrictions. Lalli is seen moving in and out of her domestic space which doubles itself up as workplace where the distinctions are not visible at all. Just as her family is a blend of people who do not actually follow the bloodline, she is also someone who does not follow separating her work space from her home space as they blend together to form her life. Of her house she says, “It’s a public space...every inch on the planet is a public space” (*TSG* 111). However, Lalli also knows when and how to draw the line- when she needs repose away from the turmoil that always seems to occupy her living room, she either retires into her bedroom, or dives into the pages of a book, or bakes. Most of the cases Lallitakes up often leave their imprint on her life, and become an emotional part of the way she deals with her professional field. She finds the death of her long estranged friend, Suketa Das, unbearable as she is able to gauge her pain (GL). When Jai, a little boy of eight years, shows Lalli the burnt marks his grandmother has given him in order to make him obey her, Lalli promises Jai: “Nobody’s going to hurt you again, Jai. Do you hear? I’ll see to that.” (Swaminathan, *TSG*, 142).

Lalli's professionalism is of a kind that calls for redefining the professional, which is mostly considered to keep all emotions at bay. In *GL*, which hovers around the serial brutalising of little girls from the Kantiwada slums, Lalli arrives at the spot when a freshly packaged dead body of another child has been left on the slum roads. The mother of the dead child would not allow anyone to touch her baby. Savio, who is in charge of the case, pleads Lalli to get the body of the baby from her mother, as the woman police officer recruited for the job has been unable to do so. When asked for the reason Savio says, "...The girls all think they have to be toughs. This one brandished her lathi at the mother" (Swaminathan, *GL* 6). To this Lalli retorts, "Nothing I can teach her then. Either you are born with compassion or you're not" (ibid: 6) asserting that compassionate bonding is natural, more so for women, but not absolutely gendered. In fact when Lalli approaches the bereaved mother, the first thing she does is break the lathi into two pieces, making it clear that reason and logic must at times take a backseat when it comes to dealing with the pain of others. Then she carefully takes the dead body of the child in her arms promising the mother that Lalli would take care of the baby. Later Sita's friend Seema Agarwal, the journalist reporting about the cases expresses her puzzlement at Lalli as she saw that Lalli "...actually physically carried it [the dead baby] in her arms" (ibid: 30). The bewildering divisions between public-private, reason-emotion, professional-personal gets blurred at that very instant.

#### 4.4. The Fashioning of Self

The 'fashioning of self' is a gradual process of evolution which is intricately linked to the notion of 'inventing' subjects, argues Himani Bannerji (3). Social subjectivity, Bannerji explicates, is a two way process- of being invented and inventing itself (ibid:3)- where while social subjects are considered as "cultural and ideological objects of others' invention" (ibid: 3), the entire process also opens up possibilities for the social subjects to invent themselves as subjects within a given socio-historical context. Hence neither social subjects, nor ideological and political agencies can be treated as spontaneous or found objects, nor should they be seen only as functions of discourses. Instead they must be seen as "dynamic, and sometimes purposive, constellations of both unconscious and conscious forms of cultural and ideological constructions which are connected to history, social organization, social relations and social locations of subjects" (ibid: 3). What can, therefore, be inferred from this

formulation is that, while it was thought that Indian woman could be framed within a construct that emerged basically from the colonial setup and has continued to remain the same, only sometimes changing garbs, women have always contributed to the formative processes of their own social subjectivities and agencies by the act of contesting and complying with such structures. Women have, thus, been involved in the self-making of their own classes, of the ideas and experiences they must grapple with. This they have been doing by adopting various modes and mediums that are available to them in order to fashion themselves and the society through a comprehension of their social, cultural and political existence as they encounter them in their everyday lives. As women's writings become an important medium for self-expression, it also provides avenues for such self-reflection, which contributes to the complexities that women's writings have generally displayed in their understanding of gender relations and women's subjective positions. It is in the pages of literature that "an extensive network and general fund of communicative competence" (Bannerji140) has been built among the women writers and women readers with the intention of creating "another social, moral and cultural space for and by women" (ibid 140).

What could be the driving force of that 'another social, moral and cultural space'? Keeping in view that the majority of women writers belong to the middle class, it is quite understandable that the class women belong to would impact their writings the most by being consciously or unconsciously woven into the narrative framework. This class consciousness should, then, render their writings impermeable to the concerns of others who are excluded from the class. But it is an interesting facet regarding women writers that while their writing makes them an empowered participant observer of their class, their privileges, it also makes them aware of their disadvantages. They realise that being subordinated by the inherent patriarchies and gendered organisation of their own classes, their agenda of empowering themselves radically can only be considered a deferred dream. As these forms of subordination find their ways into women's writings, it also makes them self-reflective, providing them with the agency to reach out and connect to all such marginalised subjects whose concerns, experience they seem to comprehend through a shared experience of subordination, beyond their immediate class and subjective positions. This is not to say, that there is a universal idea of oppression and that every woman is fighting the same enemy. This is to assert that, it is possible for women to relate through pain, through a

state of hurt, through empathetic identification, with those who lie at the peripheries of existence, quite akin to them. This identification does not neutralise differences, but allows the building of connections through differences. Empathetic identification allows the marginalised to speak through the middle class woman writer, without tampering the voice of the marginalised. This is again not to say that the writer, therefore, represents the marginalised. This is only to suggest that self-referentiality provides the writer and her character with the agency to understand the convergences of experiences through divergences of the same which might well be situated within the intersectional grid of class, caste, religion, and so on, and beyond it. The middle class woman writer, therefore, while creating the middle class urban woman subjectivity cannot isolate her from her social and cultural world which is not insulated, but spills over to allow her to be sensitive to different experiences. While this calls for heightened sensitivity, this idea also calls for complete blending with one's historical, social and political standing so that the sensitivity which thus evolves is both aware of its privileges and its limitations. This subjective experience, then, by no means can be linear, as is thought in the case of class experience. But it may have multiple strands evolving out of the subjective consciousness which is impacted by experiences that register through the intersection of class, caste, religion, and other such social categories, which the woman subjectivity is impacted by and also impacts upon. This might also lead the understanding that an experience of positive transformation in one's world cannot be possible until some necessary changes are brought about in the larger social framework (John 75).

This is best exemplified by the women detectives analysed in this chapter who while constantly attacking the very notions which form the source of the creation of Indian woman subjectivity- the notions of nation, family and work- also continue to interrogate the legitimacy of these structures by evaluating their experiences embedded within these patriarchal institutions. They show how a monolithic understanding of these structures is actually a sham created to gloss over differences that constantly seethe within the surface homogeneity of these structures. Their interrogation of the monolithic character of these institutions emerge from an empathetic comprehension of the oppressive and gendered workings of these institutions across class, caste structures. Thus, defying the structures which should have worked in conjunction to confer meanings to their subjectivity, the women detectives engender a fashioning of

the self, which allows the continuous shifting of the subjectivities as they find themselves driven into the vortex of their experiences. Destabilising the homogenous understandings of nation, family and work, dissolving the given meanings of the institutions, and indicating a need for reframing them in meanings that evolve from the experiences they encounter, the women detectives emphasize the need to concentrate on the moments which evolve as an amalgamation of what was there and what is now. It is the empathetic identification with the experiences of those outside themselves that does not allow them to rest within the complacent understandings of their own class, while also allowing them to understand their limitations. In fact even within their own class they vary in their negotiations with institutions like nation, family and work, with only one commonality- they defy uncritical acceptance of any form of overarching frame to understand themselves. They rely on contingent moments of agency and empowerment and realise that a sense of incompleteness is bound to stay in any space. It is in their self-referentiality, their critical understanding of their positions that allow them to emerge as complex subjectivities which cannot be quite framed as a monolith.

Himani Bannerji argues that, the language of social reform in the nineteenth and early years of twentieth century is inscribed within a discourse of 'crisis' (144) and 'the new times' (145), where both seem to be incumbent on each other's presence. There has also been a constant allusion to change and continuity, to tradition and modernity, so that, the most fundamental social formations, involving social identity and political subjectivity, must lay at the stake of these oppositional, but coexisting scenarios. If we emphasize on the combined movement of these opposing ideas in defining the socio-cultural impact and positioning, we may realise that in an Indian context it is impossible to move towards a future without the dovetailing of the past and present. We must inculcate notions of our own modernities and its institutions instead of trying to fit into imported garbs. We must realise that the 'crisis' will always be there, as the 'new times' will also be a persistent reality.

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup>Helen Carr. "A history of women's writings." *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, Cambridge University Press, 2007. pp. 120-137.

<sup>ii</sup>This has already been analysed in Chapter 2 of the present research with reference to the rise of detective fictions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Bengal.

<sup>iii</sup>Meenakshi Mukherjee. *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*, Oxford University Press, 1985.

<sup>iv</sup>Meera Kosambi. "Introduction: Men and Women Writing Gender" in *Women Writing Gender: Marathi Fiction Before Independence*, edited by Meera Kosambi. Permanent Black, 2012. pp. 1-77.

<sup>v</sup>Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, "Introduction", in Susie Tharu and K. Lalita edited *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present: Vol. I: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century*, The Feminist Press. 1991. pp. 1-37. archive.org: <https://archive.org/details/womenwritinginin00thar>. Accessed on 20.03.2020.

<sup>vi</sup>Barnita Bagchi. "Because Novels Are True, and Histories Are False": Indian Women Writing Fiction in English, 1860-1918." *A History of the Indian Novel in English*, edited by Ulka Anjaria, Cambridge University Press, 2015. pp. 59-72.

<sup>vii</sup>Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, "Literature of the Ancient and Medieval Periods: Reading Against the Orientalist Grain", in Susie Tharu and K. Lalita edited *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present: Vol. I: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century*, The Feminist Press. 1991. pp. 41-64. archive.org: <https://archive.org/details/womenwritinginin00thar>. Accessed on 20.03.2020.

<sup>viii</sup>Ipsita Chanda. "Women Writing Gender." *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipsita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi, Stree, 2014. pp. xx- liii.

<sup>ix</sup>Adrienne Gavin. "C.L. Pirkis (not "Miss")": Public Women, Private Lives, and The Experiences." *Writing Women of the Fin de Siecle: Authors of Change*, edited by Adrienne E. Gavin and Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. pp. 137- 150.

<sup>x</sup>Himani Bannerji. *Inventing Subjects: Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy, Colonialism*, Anthem Press London, 2001.

<sup>xi</sup>'Streejati o Shilpakarja' (1871). *Shaping the Discourse: Women's Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, edited by Ipsita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi. Trans. Debolina Guha Thakurta as 'Women and Art'. Stree. 2014. pp. 90-93.

<sup>xii</sup>Mary E. John here refers to Nivedita Menon's essay, "Is Feminism about 'Women'? A Critical View on Intersectionality from India", *EPW*, Vol. 1 No. 17, 2015 where Menon considers the international brand of 'intersectionality' to be unsuitable to gauge the terrain of Indian women subjectivity where 'woman' is not a stable, homogenous category.

<sup>xiii</sup>Mary E. John. "Intersectionality: Rejection or Critical Dialogue." *EPW*, vol. L, no. 33, 2015. pp. 72- 76.

<sup>xiv</sup>Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, "Recasting Women: An Introduction." *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, Zubaan, 1989. pp. 1-33.

<sup>xv</sup>Kavita Panjabi. "Women's Subjectivity and the 'Political' in Oral Narratives of the Tebhaga Movement: Alienation in a Politics of Liberation." *Women Contesting Culture: Changing Frames of Gender Politics in India*, edited by Kavita Panjabi and Paramita Chakrabarti, Stree, 2012. pp. 304- 323.

<sup>xvi</sup>This is suggested by Partha Chatterje and has been dealt with in details in Chapter 2 of the present research.

<sup>xvii</sup>Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, "The Twentieth Century: Women Writing the Nation", in Susie Tharu and K. Lalita edited *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present: Vol. II: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century*, The Feminist Press. 1993. pp. 43-116. archive.org: <https://archive.org/details/womenwritinginin00thar>. Accessed on 20.03.2020.

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- <sup>xviii</sup>Maitreyee Krishnaraj. "Women's Citizenship and the Private- Public Dichotomy." *EPW*, vol. XLIV, no. 17.pp. 43- 45.
- <sup>xix</sup>Nivedita Menon. "Introduction." *Gender and Politics in India*, edited by Nivedita Menon, OUP, 1999. pp. 1-36.
- <sup>xx</sup>Arindam Dasgupta. 'Introduction'. *Sekaler Goyenda Kahini: Collection of Novels*, Vol. 1 &2 edited by Arindam Dasgupta, Ananda Publishers, 2017. [Translations are mine].
- <sup>xxi</sup>Prabhabati Debi Saraswati. *GuptoGhatak*. In *Kanchenjunga Series*. Vol. 3, Deb Sahitya Kutir, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2003. [Translations are mine].
- <sup>xxii</sup>Nirmalya Ghosh. "Goyendanir Shatkahan." *Bangla Goyenda Sahitya Sankha*, edited by Tapash Bhaumik, *Korok Sahitya Patrika*, 2017. pp. 67-79. [Translations are mine].
- <sup>xxiii</sup>Prabhabati Debi Saraswati. *Hatyar Pratishodh*. In *Kanchenjunga Series*. Vol. 3, Deb Sahitya Kutir, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2003. [Translations are mine].
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- <sup>xxvi</sup>As analysed by Ghosh.
- <sup>xxvii</sup>Suchitra Bhattacharya. *Saraandeye Shoitaan*. Ananda Publishers, 2003. [Translations are mine].
- <sup>xxviii</sup>Suchitra Bhattacharya. *Arakieler Heeray*. Ananda Publishers, 2009. [Translations are mine].
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- <sup>xxx</sup>Suchitra Bhattacharya. *Syander Saheber Puthi*. Ananda Publishers, 2016. [Translations are mine].
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- <sup>xl</sup>Ellen Ross Rapp. "Examining Family History." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1979. pp. 174-200.
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- <sup>xlii</sup>Suchitra Bhattacharya. *Jonathan er Barir Bhoot*. Ananda Publishers, 2004. [Translations are mine].

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<sup>xliv</sup>Dutta, Amrita. "The Good in the Bad", *The Indian Express*, April 7, 2018. Accessed on 17 March 2020. <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/books/the-good-in-the-bad-murder-in-seven-acts-lalli-mysteries-kalpana-swaminathan-5126832/>

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## Chapter – 5

### The Vocabulary of Violence: Reading Indian Woman Detective Fictions

“After a while she said, ‘The real crimes are always beyond punishment’”

- *I Never Knew It was You* (Swaminathan, 2012)

#### 5.1. Introduction

The inevitable attention that ‘crime’ in ‘crime fiction’ garners emanates from what seems to be an enigmatic understanding of what crime could possibly mean. Knight, while dwelling on the reason to attribute the term ‘crime fiction’ as an overarching idea to frame a host of subgenres like thriller, detective fiction, spy fiction and the likes, enumerates activities like theft, fraud, kidnapping, and definitely, murder, as crimes which become the fulcrum of the fictions that are placed within this genre (*Detection* 2004; *Ideology* 1980). The problem, however, is that one cannot be simplistically tautological- crime fiction is not just stories of crime, nor vice versa! In fact, while stories have always told tales of crime in numerous ways, only a few may be designated as ‘crime fiction’. Reasoning out differentiation has fostered few logic of which, the foremost, is that crime fiction achieves its difference by creating the sense of an authority which not only lays down the parameters of judging criminal behavior, but also floats the promise of retribution, by neutralizing the effects of crime, and allowing a return to a former condition of peace, so to speak (Knight 2004; Scaggs 2005; Rzepka 2010). This authority, which often takes the garb of the state, either assumes the power of a sovereign authority, who must handle the crime with an intention of ending it by way of ending the criminal, or acts as a disciplining authority where it assumes the role of a rectifier, creating avenues of change for the perpetrator, trying to counter the violence incurred by administering ways of neutralizing it (Knight<sup>1</sup>, *Ideology*, 5). Being a disciplining authority it disseminates codes of discipline and also provides avenues of rectification, the idea of learning from the mistakes, thus upholding the notion of a benevolent and corrective authority. What prompts the character of ‘discipline’ depends on what the authority regards as necessary to control, or to contain or subdue, in order to promote its authoritarian imperative.

Therefore, it seems that in order to constantly create a legitimization of the idea of the state as a protector, and its benevolent nature interred in the retributive and corrective measures, the incorporation of crime in the fictions grouped as 'crime fiction' becomes a necessity. Crime fictions seem to set out with a predetermined agenda of creating a belief in the idea of the presence of a holistic world, whose steady flow is disrupted by interventions, such as crime, but which has potential agents to inevitably smoothen its creases so much so that a positivist idea of a just world may be upheld. Then, something disruptive like crime is essential for the authorial, disciplining authority to prove its legitimacy. Is this act of legitimization an one timely affair? No, it cannot be so because it is common parlance that every 'truth' requires repeated legitimisation to establish itself as truth. Then, crime can never be neutralized because if that had been the case, then, there would be a world without crime, which could mean a world without the need for an authoritarian disciplining state. Thus, crime stays on as effects, as violent effects, which remain invisible as they subsumes into everyday ideology. This ideological presence of violence in our everyday is so unrecognizable that forms of violence never fail to shock us, or disturb us, because we always consider violence as an aberration, and not something we tend to indulge into in the varied ways that we lead our everyday existence. Again, what, therefore, looks like a simplistic agenda here, seems to gloss over another simple fact that the very entry of a disruption within what is thought to be an organic whole also brings up the point of fracture within the frame of that organic whole through which such an entry has been made possible. As such to consider the disruption as an outside element might be to completely disregard a plausible reality, a presence in absence.

The act of narration of crime seems to draw immensely from the idea of violence, not just as an effect which can be seen in the acts of theft, fraud or murder, but as an element that is there- always and already present- embedded within the social and cultural consciousness of every societal setup. Hence, the comingled effect of these ideas seem to lead to an understanding of a disruption that is located within, entrenched in the very being of the society, which inevitably points towards the propensity of being violent, even at times, without any consciousness of it. The crime, the violence that crime fiction deals with, seems to enwrap our consciousness, so much so, that the proof of violence makes it important to perceive it. In fact, when crime fiction was being born out of prison narratives and police diaries, both the western and Indian canons, the

emphasis on the proofs of crime was intense, as it could alone provide the state with enough room to take its course, to mark a deed as criminal, bring the criminal to justice, restore order and evolve both as the assessor of crime and the agent of justice.

When the figure of the detective was brought to the fore as the authority in whom the powers of the state was vested in myriad forms, the entire onus of keeping up to the expectations build around crime fiction was laden on this individual. The individual detective hero became the representative of the class of which she also became the provider. Hence ideas of violence, crime, proofs, morality and even detection as a profession became entangled with the subjective presence of the detective who was now to chart the way out of confusion, and restore calm when all passion had been spent. However, a closer look into these fictions, and also into the figures of the detectives, might bring out a consistent sense of unease even when the very objective of crime fiction has been achieved. Loose ends seem to hang all across such narratives, and there seems to lurk within its frame a pervading sense of disquiet. This disquiet seems to become a raging roar when a woman becomes the detective in the public world of detection, and the patriarchal, masculine state structure feels insecure by such an intervention. It is only when one tries to comprehend the disquiet that lurks within the crevices of the narratives, after the issues are seemingly resolved, that such avenues open up which allow us to consider why the disquiet remains and what is its character. It is only when such complacency is allowed to dissolve that a need seems to emerge to renegotiate with the ideas of a just world that crime fictions seem to forward so assertively. Is that just world even achievable, or just a permanent absence, a perpetually deferred reality? It becomes necessary to delve into the fictions to extract newer meanings from its seemingly uncomplicated framework, and more so when woman detectives are brought to the fore for understanding violence, since violence, gender and sexuality have always had an intricate connection.

In its aim to explore such concerns the chapter intends to investigate how the Indian women writers have dealt with the changing forms of violence which remain embedded within the narrative structure of the fictions. The chapter goes on to explicate how the idea of violence and just world plays itself in the narrative structure of these detective fictions and analyse the complexities which emerge when the detective is a woman. The chapter intends to premise its argument by reading into the

idea of violence, its workings and attributes which could allow us to understand how, instead of being an aberration, or an event, it is constantly present and plays its role in our everyday realities. Since Indian women's detective fictions have been continuously interrogating the given in the socio-cultural and also in the narrative fabric of the genre, it might be interesting to examine how it deals with the various forms of violence, a category which is intricately linked to both women and detective fictions.

## 5.2. Reading into the vocabulary of violence

As the varied contours of violence seem to ruffle up our complacent ideas on violence, an intellectual engagement with violence becomes a crucial task in a world where violence is not only associated with fear, but also seems to impart a voyeuristic pleasure, while sometimes distorting the cause-effect dialectic by being there for its own sake. Delving deeper into the workings of the notion of violence within a narrative, it becomes significant to problematize the meaning of violence itself from which, Has<sup>ii</sup> infers, a demystification of violence could be attained (26). The point of beginning an enquiry into the idea of violence, therefore, hinges around two important departure points- what counts as violence and what causes violence.

The multifarious indicators of what causes violence makes it difficult to zoom into any particular cause of violence; hence a ubiquitous theory on violence becomes quite impossible. The former question is quite a tricky one given the ever-expanding range of acts that are counted as violence. While the stories of violence try to invoke a sense of morality, by ironically hinting at the hypocrisy of our ideals, a 'fashion of violence' can be traced in the way violence operates with a certain regularity in any society where there is unequal distribution of wealth, which leads to poverty stemming out of political causes which are thought to be readily remedied (Elliot<sup>iii</sup> 33). Again, being violent is often used to emphasize masculine attributes where endurance of the effects of violence, in the form of pain, becomes a signifier of masculinity (ibid: 33). Working outside the codes of what is acceptable by law is the marked principal of violence, which renders violence attractive as it becomes coded with the element of disobedience. Seldom do we realise that our attractiveness towards this kind of violence emanates from a dissatisfaction with ourselves which emerges from an inability to create the notion of fixity that should define or determine us (ibid: 34). Hence, when our everyday lives are marked by hurdles, lack of fixity, dissatisfaction, struggles,

betrayals, all of which cause a waning of our positive energies, thus making both the cause and content of violence ambiguous, it becomes difficult to understand violence as distinct from peace (Has 26).

The question which inevitably comes up now is why it is so difficult to comprehend violence. Does this also mean that the reductionist attitude towards violence as only negative must be unpacked? Commonly, violence is considered to have two levels of manifestation- micro, or individual and macro, or political (Collins<sup>iv</sup> 10). In both these forms of manifestation violence becomes something that needs to be eradicated or controlled (ibid: 10). It is as if deemed that violence can only be accepted when it leads to non-violence, which seems to be the ultimate goal for humanity (Has 27). However, Has asserts that this idea of violence readily leads us to comprehending violence by using a “narrowly subjectivist normative framework” (27) where it is either seen as a means to an end, performed by some actors, or is used to impact moral evaluation, or is considered as an outcome of some deep rooted elements in human nature, “which may at best be repressed but never completely erased” (ibid: 28). This idea of violence tends to reduce the concept of human violence to that of aggression. The key to demystifying violence lies in differentiating violence from aggression which tends to become both the cause and effect of violence, and also seems to float the notion of violence as something that is external to a system. Interestingly in this context, Yusuf Has points out that by reducing the range of violence to physical acts and effects, and by considering it as a negative or undesirable phenomenon, we tend to blind ourselves to the genuinely transformative political project of violence (28). What is also important to note here is that reduction of the range of violence might make us miss the point of violence.

It is commonly thought that violence is a part of social reality which has been there from prehistoric times. Has puts forth the notion that the very being of violence has been historically constructed to give it meanings quite in the likeness of all social constructions (28), thus making it as much part of political evolution as any other social construct. Violence has been constructed to the effect that through such a construction there has been concealment, which has not only led to constructing a certain comprehension of violence, often opening up space for the mystification of violence, but has also created a sense of naturalisation of violence when it cannot be mystified

(Has 29). This idea of concealment generates a notion of truth, which is disseminated to support power in most effective ways, especially by inscribing it in everyday discourses and practices, which, through the various forms of hegemony, in turn also affects the understanding of truth (ibid: 29).

From such a standpoint we can infer that it is in the background of discourses and practices where truth and power interplay that the concept of violence is produced. It seems, therefore, that the historical ontology of violence is quite concerned with how we are constituted as subjects, especially scrutinising the space of possibilities that may be opened up or closed off for us by means of such a creation (Has 30). Violence concerns both with limits which are put on us, and also with the experiments that tend to display the possibilities of going beyond those set limits. When violence is seen as aggression, which sees the relationship of violence to various forms and outward manifestations of dominance like exploitation, racism or sexism, which only concerns itself with human destruction, we tend to dismiss another major aspect of violence- the possibility of a positive relationship between violence and human freedom (ibid: 31), where the very scope of resistance against violence tends to create scope for emancipation (ibid: 31). As the structures of dominance tend to close off the possibilities of every day being, the opening up of such possibilities would have to be a violent event that would vehemently resist those structures of dominance (ibid: 35). It is in the resistance to violence that the agential possibility lurks.

Such agentiality would be possible only when one is able to recognise an act as violent. It is interesting that while the idea of violence evades any fixity, in common parlance it is still found that violence is always seen to have an affiliation with physical or bodily harm. When, in the reign of advanced capitalism, there is a decline in physical violence in many spheres of life, and a heightened sensitivity to different forms of brutality so that the conceptual space of violence includes all forms of violation and destruction, why does this space, remain constricted to affiliating the tag of 'violence' either to acts of bodily damage or destruction of material property? It seems that this tends to emanate from a world view in which human well-being is associated primarily with security and prolongation of life as property, which would perceive violence only when physical damage is present, Has infers (39). This makes it

possible to identifying intentions as well as actors for such forms of violence so as to launch retributive or corrective action.

But the being of humans generally exceeds such constricted idea of being, often going beyond the idea of palpability. For example, there is a whole range of social and intellectual possibilities which can be opened by the human capability of language. There are capabilities which lead to happiness, which is about a life of activity that has as its end the development of essential intellectual and social human capacities, which extends beyond the public realm of affairs. Has states that the very object of violence, inherent in the order of late capitalism, is to destroy the openings to all other possibilities, by normalising constricted conditions of existence, and the closure of possibilities/capabilities of our social being as a whole (40). The closure of these capabilities, which define human life as activity, should be the proper concern of a critique of violence.

The very comprehension of the closure of these capabilities requires a sense of recognising the point of closure which can become easily invisible as it operates within the complicit cycles of everyday. As the very nature of 'everyday' is inherent in the idea of repetition, everyday adheres itself to an inherent past that is constructed as a continuum, 'a common denominator', 'a sole surviving common sense referent and point of reference' (Has 32). The continuity of repetition induces monotony, masks the variable with its invariable constant. The change which is always a constant fails to be marked as it is superimposed by this programmed monotony which in turn creates passivity, a sort of illusion of stagnation (Roy<sup>v</sup> 317). This sense of passivity makes recognition of anything that is uneventful impossible. Only that which appears to create a break in this flow of everyday, surfaces as an event, as a spectacle, and becomes recognised or visible. The closures which are, therefore, accompanied by structures which function through such spectacle alone can be visible because of its non-everydayness. However, that which cannot be bracketed, that which continues to flow through the strain of the continuum stays quite away from the visible/recognisable cycle of things. It is by recognising the points and nature of such closures of possibilities that we can locate the ordinariness of violence and how it is constantly functioning within our everyday, shaping our everyday, yet beyond our grasp of understanding, thus constantly dismantling our vocabulary of violence.

### 5.3. Locating the everydayness of violence

An explication into the categories of violence may allow a rough distinction of what can be considered as direct and indirect forms of violence. Direct forms of violence are characterised as those forms which involve physical, tangible components of the effects of violence, laying bare the identity of the perpetrator. The flow of violence is considered unidirectional, from the perpetrator to the victim, who is respectively diagnosed as the active agent and the passive recipient of violence. This form of violence is recognised as an aberration in the normal flow of things because it receives attention by creating a state of exception. The ‘assault’ administered by this form of violence tends to become shockingly evident when the encroachment upon the physical or bodily integrity of another living entity, mostly human, can be seen to affect her materially. However, this tends to be a positivist concept, where only those forms of injury are acknowledged as violent which are able to create palpable recognition as harm, and the conditions, thus, produced are considered reversible. The possibilities of harm that may transcend beyond the boundaries of visibility remain dormant, unrecognised.

Thus comes up the necessity to dwell into other possibilities of violence which might not be easily categorised as violent. The indirect or latent forms of violence constitute a kind of injury that is considered sanctioned and permissible. This sanction evolves from a conglomerate of understandings which may involve explicit, implicit, cultural, moral, political, legal norms, which ultimately determine what is to be sanctioned as legitimate and illegitimate forces of violence. Among these elements what becomes more subtle is what kind of injury is to be considered as permissible source of violence, and what could be dismissed. In *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) Engels<sup>vi</sup> exemplifies how power structures operating within societies place thousands of proletariats in such precarious positions in terms of health, economy, or living conditions, that they inevitably meet too early, and sometimes, unnatural deaths, often rising out of desperate material conditions of their existence. While such acts of desperation relegates the marginalised as violent group, of whom the privileged are wary, their subtle strategic positioning within the political economy which drives the former groups to such acts of desperation often remain under the veil, and is not considered an act of violence. In fact, Engels suggests, that the deaths of the



marginalised may well be considered as death by the violent strategies of the privileged, which is no less atrocious than may be death by a sword or a bullet. This indirect form of violence is interred within the very structures of society, embedded with so much subtlety that it becomes impossible to recognise these movements as violent.

The violence which has, thus, been strategized by structures of power in a way that it becomes embedded within the everyday, as normalised and routine acts of life and living, may be considered as structural violence. A depersonalised form of violence, this violence is perpetrated as an unrecognisable form because of the absence of any clear agent or recipient of violence. It is a form of violence that goes on in all pervasive modes, beyond independent events. In fact the repetitiveness and continuity of violence makes it invisible and unrecognisable, as part of an everyday. It is influenced by structures of power and also converted into invisibility by the structures of power. These structures administer violence under the garb of being benevolent and protective, so much so that such forms of violence are easily subsumed into routine activity so that these cannot be recognised as violent. Moreover, the all-pervasive nature of this form of violence, the way it affects all, magnitude of it depending on the tiers of power, makes it seem unavoidable. In the helplessness to deal with it, the violence continues with different levels of consent. This is structural violence which is considered as action built into the structures of society where the society manifests itself especially through unequal power structures which provide the germinating space for violence to occur. In fact it is in the inequality of distribution- of power and resources- which forms the bedrock of this form of violence. Structural violence goes on to legitimise, or justify, cultural violence which is continuously manifested through the symbolic sphere where gender, institutional structures operative within society, language, actions, all become imbricated within what may be considered as indirect forms of violence.

Has points out that law is one such structure which functions in a subtle way to legitimise and institutionalise power which is constantly supported by violence. Legal violence, in Benjamin's terms, is 'mythical violence', a category of violence that has almost acquired mythical status since it has moved from legalisation to normalisation, thus creating an atmosphere of acceptance without questions (Has 40). The idea of

normalisation, or the ‘normal’, functions within structures of power which dominate by administering less conspicuous means than legal prohibitions. This idea is, then, implemented in a habitus, supported by dogmas of ‘freedom’, ‘equality’ and ‘progress’ which ultimately leads to the closure of all possibilities of a social being (Has 41). Thus, ‘mythical violence’ goes on to make boundaries, where the role of language becomes immensely important in creating the framework for all kinds of systemic violence.

There is always something inherently violent about language, as a whole, which always imposes a certain framework of meaning which, through repetitive usage, conveniently excludes from both the consciousness and the presence that which cannot be reduced to this framework (Roy 319). It is a complex mode of concealment that becomes an essential part of the closure to recognise and destabilise violence. ‘Violence of closure’, which Has points out, uses various means of constricting differences to exist and reduce everything to a sort of identity (47). Violence against women is not just about the brutality women face in everyday lives; it is about social violence which is embedded in the very identity of being a woman, which dictates the do’s and don’t’s; asks a woman to ‘fit in’, to ‘belong’. This makes women shrink in a certain way of sameness, which creates a closure that can imprison her for her entire life.

It is this idea that invokes an obligation to recognize and comprehend the “grey zones of violence, which are by definition, not obvious” (Roy 320). The excesses of violence, inflicted by any machinery, whether political or domestic, cannot be ignored or erased because there is always a tendency of privileging any extreme nature of violence (ibid: 319). This visibility is accompanied by a subtle invisibility of the more ‘ordinary’ forms of violence. As such the extreme manifestation of violence is mostly considered as state-sponsored terror, and kept outside the social and every day. The gendered form of violence is one such invisible form of violence which continues to haunt those who are marginalised with respect to an intersectional grid of class, caste, religion, race, gender and such other social and cultural categories. It is definitely the dark underside of progression against which women’s empowerment must be debated. It becomes significant that violence is no longer exceptionalised, but is seen against the backdrop of the ‘violence of everyday’ (ibid: 319).

Everyday violence points towards a continuity of violence which lies under the superstructure of visible forms of violence and translates itself into symbolic forms of violence. Drawing on Bourdieu's sociology of multiple and interrelated fields, Roy treats violence as a continuum of overlapping forms and forces, be they political, structural, or symbolic (qtd. in Roy 321). For Bourdieu the concept of symbolic violence attaches itself to designate 'gentle violence' that operates with the complicity of the oppressed, or what he calls misrecognition where the structure of inequalities and oppression appear natural (Roy 322). The concept of continuum of violence allows the identification and analysis of these implicit forms of violence which tend to become invisible because of their unspectacular forms, in comparison to the spectacular forms of violence which evolve during abnormal times. The violence which is recognised as violence of the abnormal times is further mediated by the ubiquitous presence of all forms of media which tend to create a spectacle of violence.

Roy asserts that it is in what Marcuse calls a 'permissive society', which is able to keep, with the least physical exertion, the violence of the social order of things intact, where subtle means of subjugation make us all participants in this system that subjugates (325). It is also significant to disclose to ourselves that violence does not come to the fore only as manifestation of violence on the existence of beings; what comes to the fore through the physical manifestations of violence is violence itself, as it is ingrained in the being as a whole.

#### **5.4. When violence finds words, or does it?**

How can one narrate violence? By narrating the effects as an aftermath, or by producing vivid details of an on-going act of violence, or in retrospect? Moreover, can violence be narrated at all, or can there be only a narration *of* violence? For this narration to take place it becomes important to recognise an event as violent, in the first place. When violence becomes an everyday act or an everyday experience, something which one does or encounters on a daily basis, violence is camouflaged by its everydayness which does not make it comprehensible enough for the narration to happen. Even when such narration might take place, it becomes difficult to concretely present facts and the articulation of violence continues to linger at the edges of conversation. This brings up the second problem with the narration of violence. The risk that such a narration might not capture the experience at all, or might lessen the

effect of violence or the idea of violence, sometimes even making it appear false, seems to lurk in the background of such a narration. The third problem arises from the fact that the thin line between voyeurism and narration of events to produce the desired effects of horror or pain becomes a crucial point to negotiate with in such a narration. It is then that the element of shame is sometimes associated with such memories of violence which then remain as some secret that is supposed to be silenced, often assimilated into daily living, and even hidden away, because bringing these narratives to the public might not always guarantee the desired effect. Violence may be inexplicable in the very sense of the term, that which evades reason, logic or any form of sense.

How can, then, the violence of intimate experiences be narrated and to what effect? Women's movements in India have been effective in creating 'semantic shifts particularly in the discourse of violence against women' (Roy 320). The notion of a 'narrative contract', as Sudipta Kaviraj points out, can be brought about to play a crucial role in understanding how these movements have influenced the 'tellability' of violence against women with respect to its expression in the public sphere (qtd. in Roy 320). There is a sense of a common comprehension of violence that develops between the speaker and the listener which is much influenced by the idea of a common thread that evolves out of feminist discourses and the way they render comprehension of violence possible, even when these are uttered through half silences (Roy 321). This circle of feminist communication mostly creates an ease of expressing violence, since it allows narration to navigate between utterances and silences. The secrecy and privacy of the truths of violence when narrated through utterances and silences tend to create comprehension emanating from a common pool of experiences that is encountered by hurt, a sort of publicly known, but ignored truth. In fact, one of the methods by which violence is made invisible is by pitting it against the enormity of the visible forms of violence which always appear to be exalted in magnitude given that the evidences of such violence are always palpable. This goes on to create an understanding of safety within the intimate spaces of family, home, friendship, love which when scrutinised could reveal enough evidences of structural violence given the institutionalised structures these are already a part of. The nature of these invisible forms of violence emanate from a continuum of muting everyday forms of violence by which the marginalised sections of society, be it women, children or those who remain outside the

normative arrangement of gender and sexuality, become more affected as they are constantly driven by the constrictive ideologies of honour and respectability (Roy 326-28). Thus this creates a fetishization of secrecy in the name of class, caste, gender, religion which ultimately comes to expression as a silencing and suppression of acts of injury at the micro and interpersonal level.

The silencing of violence also emanates from an inability to comprehend how acts in the most habitual situation of care and love can be understood as interruptions within the flow of ordinary. We are most of time unable to discern and differentiate acts of care from acts of harm when both these acts are performed by the same person on whom is vested the trust of being an agent of happiness and protection. Women are unable to understand the violence of incest as it happens within the ambit of care, thus making the sense of violence ambivalent and confused. While it becomes impossible to cast a male protector in the role of sexual aggressor, the ambiguity renders closest relationships precarious, also allowing the possibility of betrayal to seep into the patterns of relationships. The trauma of these experiences of betrayal is so intimate that articulation of these acts might at times diminish the intensity of violence by making the violence administered and encountered merely factual (Zizek<sup>vii</sup> 11). This too renders articulation, hence visibility, of such violence quite problematic. Another mechanism which causes the silencing of violence is the symbolic violence of masculine domination (ibid: 12), whereby victims not only fail to recognise the violator or the oppressive power relations at work within which they are implicated, but actually blame themselves for their effects. This sort of symbolic violence becomes further naturalised when the political rhetoric magnifies such self-flagellation to subsume them into the discourses of patriarchy and make women, as a category, become both the cause and the effect for their experiences of violence (Roy 324). Sometimes violence is normalised as ‘a banal instrumental necessity’ which justifies all kinds of violence ranging from those which evolve as revengeful violence, tactful violence, violence for violence’s sake and makes it all seem to much a part of a normal structure (Roy 325). Hence the ‘extraordinary’ violence that seeps into the most ordinary happenings of the everyday continuously overtakes us as a ‘state of exception’.

Thus violence which occurs in those spaces which are marked safe renders the lives of the marginalised within these structures of power vulnerable and precarious.

The situation becomes more intensely adverse when such violence occurs within the ordinary everyday life which remains unnoticed because of the trust of non-happening that is placed on such lives (Roy 326). Violence here becomes a continuum which enmeshes both the internal invisible violence of everyday lives and the external extraordinariness of violence which would allow the exploration of subjectivities that thus emerge at this point of suture (Roy 329). The violence continuum opens up the analytic space for appreciating in concrete terms the very workings of the multiple forms of violence from the most intimate spaces which seem inseparable from the wider discourse of violence that may be latched on to events of the extraordinary times, or inexplicable instances of the ordinary times which might render certain forms of violence indefinable, without rendering the category of violence empty. May be this could allow us to use Srila Roy's terminology the "greyness of violence" (Roy 329) where violence that marks everyday life cannot be separated from the larger contexts of violence which tend to induce violence with considerable impunity.

In this context Zizek's triangulation with subjective, systemic and symbolic violence forms a significant framework to consider the different levels at which violence inhabits the social psyche and its material contexts. Violence is considered only when there is a subjective agent putting the signals of violence before us to identify these as violence by associating or comparing it with our given notions of violence, oblivious of the contexts which affect the contours of violence (Zizek 13). In the way of perceiving the contours of violence, Zizek divides subjective violence into two most objective kinds of violence. One is 'symbolic' violence which is embodied in language and its form, or in our house of 'being', as Heidegger would have said, asserts Zizek, thus making such violence embedded within our everyday practices of existence (ibid: 13). This form of violence is also responsible for creating social domination in our habitual speech forms where we may often use such language without being conscious of the violence implicated within it. Language could also extend itself to action, the gestures of the body. The second type, Zizek points out, is systemic violence which is realised as "the catastrophic consequence of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems" (12). This is to say that such violence are inevitable effects of economic and political systems which govern us and are often subsumed into the rhetoric of statehood and other such patriarchal structures. Subjective and objective violence cannot be understood from the same standpoint. While subjective violence is

considered as a deviation from what is to be considered as peace, objective violence is “precisely the violence inherent to this ‘normal state of things’” (Zizek 14). Hence while subjective violence creates a state of exception, objective violence is subsumed into those invisible forms. Zizek points out that this invisibility is due to the fact that objective violence sustains the ‘zero-level’ standard against what we perceive as subjectively violence (ibid: 12).

In trying to explicate the idea of the mediatised form of violence, the form which adds glamour to violence by either siding with the victim or the perpetrator, almost blocking the thinking processes of those who observe it, Zizek asserts that there is certainly something inherently mystifying in direct confrontation with such forms of violence which overpowers the thinking act by the spectacle of horror at the violent act and by the need to empathise with the victims (12). It is here that the act of narrating violence always stands in a double bind- one, where narration is important to let know; the other, where narration is continuously threatened by the thin lines between voyeurism, factuality and arousing empathy. It is subjective violence that receives most attention as it can recognise its agent of violence and can also hold the effect as proof. But it must be realised that the visibility of these agents are directed to detract us from the actual originary points of violence, which continue to remain invisible.

Therefore, by a complex interaction between the three forms of violence- subjective, objective and systemic- we may be able to comprehend the workings of violence, instead of just concentrating on its agents or its effects. It is important to recognise the continuum of violence, which confers violence with mobility from the micro to the macro dimensions of violence and vice versa, but tends to create a sense of monotony, as this movement remains beyond distinction. This makes violence incomprehensible, although it remains as an unobliterable presence. It is important to demystify violence, bring it out from the parenthetical status of a ‘state of exception’, and understand its contours as a social construct with historicity. Violence as a continuum might lose its grade as being distinct from peace, or being relegated as aggression which is outside the system. Violence operates within the system and has a definitive role to play in the construction of subjectivities. One could speak of the violence of closure which constricts the comprehension of differences, even eliminates the idea of difference, in order to forward a sense of identification. It tends to create a

permissive society to allow its easy flow and often operates with the intention to closing off potentialities. But just as the forms of violence cannot be brought under the same umbrella, it is also important to understand how violence might also become instrumental in the creation of possibilities, which might allow a comprehension of the contingent moments of eruption of potentialities, which could also be violent. Žizek contends that, being out of touch with our realities, we continue to engross ourselves in shadow reality struggles (17). Hence it is important to try and fathom the incomprehensible contours of violence in its changing forms, and also to fortify our vocabulary with the multiple dimensions of violence.

Thus while there is no single strategy or position that might bind all groups together, there is definitely a consensus which rejects rationalising of violence while also recognising the complexity of the field. Literary representations of violence constantly reveal the patriarchal structures of violence within which it operates making it imperative to confront the ways and methods of representing violence. Again literary representations also implicitly hide within their forms the kind of violence that may no longer be adjudged as violence, because of the ways it is subsumed into our everyday. Using a confluence of the above notions as a lens, this research would attempt to delve into understanding how the idea of violence is operative within the narrative framework of detective fictions, across time, and space. This would further allow comprehension of the subjectivity of the urban, middle class, woman detective who must brush her shoulders with violence, in all its forms, on an everyday basis. This would, thereby, further the project of comprehending how the genre of detective fictions ultimately negotiates with its agenda of forwarding the idea of a just world. In what ways can a world, where violence is present as a continuum, be considered 'just'? Is it about conjuring an unreal or utopian world? If detective fictions can be only about conjuring an unreal world, why is it still the most widely read genre?

### **5.5. Violence of normal times**

How does one make sense of something which completely evades sense? When a little girl is kidnapped, drugged, and raped repeatedly for days before her lifeless body is flung into the valley, where she used to bring her sheep to graze, what form of sense could be attached to the unimaginable fury of such acts? Theories, analysis, would bring up reasons for such brutal acts, may be, but is it possible still to infuse this



with a slightest ‘sense’ of what could be? Real crimes are definitely beyond punishment, just as violence, in all its nudity, is beyond comprehension.

Yet violence – “overt, raw, genocidal, gendered, identitarian, authoritarian, structural violence by private and state actors involved together or severally” (Kannabiran<sup>viii</sup> 2) have been part of discussions which have always tried to grapple with the meanings of violence. In fact creative writers have always held a stunning array of modes by which they have spoken to and about violence, laying bare the underbelly of social orders in India. While this has allowed some permeability into the unspeakability of violence, it has also stunted the ways one can speak about violence. The presence of violence is ubiquitous, and so is its unspeakability. In the self-same way there is an appearance of exceptionality in violence, even when it might structure our everyday; there is an invocation of a rude and crude authority and an oppressor, even when the perpetrator may be someone extremely ordinary. Yet, as violence has been spoken about in ways that make it belong to a stand that opposes civilisation, or make it possess some aberrational essence, violence in all its essence, not as an effect but an end in itself, has mostly evaded serious discussion. Most often violence figures in the discussion on other things- as a means to understand other realities and dynamics, although violence is in itself political.

Any understanding of patterns, forms, and categories of violence can only emerge from specific social, political and historical formulations where articulations of violence may create complete silences prompted by filtration through institutional and infrastructural arrangements which might mediate the articulation of violence (Kannabiran 3). As such articulation of violence must entail unravelling the complex and layered ways in which narratives of violence may be formed (ibid: 2). It is important, therefore, to transpose the understandings of violence from its habitual signposts and attempt an unravelling of the contours of violence. There is a need to unpack the common sense wisdom we so uncritically receive about our everyday life worlds in order to extricate the tremors of violence that are buried deep within the archaeologies of knowledge and knowledge production. Such an extraction would require acknowledging the forms of violence which is known and given which requires further delving in order to unravel how violence tends to become exceptional despite being a presence in absence (Kannabiran 3).

Thus when with respect to the subcontinent we look at colonialism as the period of extreme violence, we must realise that habitations of violence is entrenched within discourses of colonialism which mask deeply imbricated forms of structural violence. This violence, as David Arnold maintains, is an intrinsic part of modernity, ushered in by colonialism, to the extent that coercion and violence become integral to how modern states and societies actually function (qtd. in Kannabiran 4) and are formed. While plurality, pluralism, diversity, difference has been accepted as the given stance today, these infinite diversities that confront democracies today is a problem which is sorted by political communities in a way they constitute their boundaries, deciding who would fall in it and who would not. Any form of aberration there unleashes violence which intends to homogenise in the name of nation.

The word 'nation' in an Indian context evokes the most painful memories of violence which has been marked by the event of the largest migration of world history- the partition of the Indian subcontinent into two nations- Indian and Pakistan. It ruffles up comprehension of violence when it is analysed that the violence among communities, that shared histories since times immemorial, was not and could not be sporadic. Talbot and Singh point out that this violence is about ethnic cleansing, and is situated in the political context of negotiations for power and territory (qtd. in Kannabiran7). As such violence continued to recur- during the Bangladesh War in 1971, during violence within the countries at regular interval. Moreover, it did not just involve violence in the form of fatality, but focussed more on the unprecedented nature of the brutality of violence which were embedded within honour discourses, especially the ones meted out to women. It has been found that most of the assaults on women took place in the private realms, and there was high planning involved in the attacks (ibid: 7). Violence that occurred actually was not embedded only in the acts of violence, but in the politics that informed it, in the intention that it wanted to serve. While the unleashing of violence was due to the impossibility of the ways in which acts of dialogue and partition tend to be undefinable (ibid: 7), it was also embedded within the state's unwillingness to take responsibility of its own act.

Moreover, one becomes curious to understand why non-violence as an ideology failed to become a driving force in the context of Partition. V. Geeta recalls the time when Gandhi moved from one relief camp to the other during and after the Partition

riots, not only to fathom the loss, but also to fathom the reasons as to why his idealism failed to keep its hold (qtd. in Kannabiran 5). Partition violence, in fact, shows how nation is a forceful act towards creating a community where differences must be eliminated in order to allow 'nation' to stand. While "the public sexualised performance of violence on both men and women" (ibid: 6) allowed the emergence of the idea of violence as spectacle, reminding one of the guillotine, analysis of Partition violence have also revealed the havoc it played on the woman body, the woman psyche, in ways that may be considered unprecedented. However, in the bid to create a national history of masculine pride all was suppressed until the unspoken, unspeakable violence was revealed by feminist analysis. Interestingly, whatever attention has been hence procured by the narratives of violence on women, the violence meted out to men, especially the sexual violence has been thoroughly subdued. While the acceptance of the female body of violence allows the state to strategise the creation of an 'other' body which is epitomised as the site of violence, hence vulnerable and in need of protection by the masculine state, the masculine body as a site of violence completely vanishes in order to remove the male body from the discourses of vulnerability, and assert it's potential as an instrument to create the masculine state (Das 287)<sup>ix</sup>. Thus the association of violence with shame, honour, vulnerability discourses persist.

However, this is not to say that violence only surfaces as an exception during abnormal times. In fact, it seems that it is the inscription of communal identities on women's bodies through practices of violence during normal times which actually gallops in intensity and frequency during the troubled times, almost creating an understanding of violence that becomes timeless and all-pervasive. This all-pervasiveness of violence tends to normalise violence within institutions, cultures, societies and communities to a point of rendering it invisible, and also creating a violence of closure. However, it is by the constant negotiation with the violence of these structures that it becomes possible to recognise violence as a construct which can be countered by infusing it with possibilities of emancipation and agency.

#### **5.6. Under the Indian shade: Women's movements, violence and detective fictions**

Vina Majumdar, recalls Mary E. John<sup>x</sup>, considered women's studies not as a discipline, but as a perspective, an intervention which required allowing women's issues, gender issues to be brought into anything that one does so that such

understandings may emerge as catalysts for what they affect elsewhere. This notion provides an opening to allow an understanding of the issue of violence in an Indian context which has been a sitting issue for feminism having a historicity of its own which has continuously been marked by shifting terrains. It seems, according to John<sup>xi</sup>, that only when violence has emerged as a coercive force through a whole range of acts that it has become some kind of a touchstone for the recognition of an issue as a “woman’s issue” (138) or, as an issue at all. However, women’s movements in India have always been careful to unpack the tenets of violence, especially gendered violence, which also allowed the newer comprehension of violence to evolve.

The two horrific incidents of custodial rape which is said to have galvanised the issue of violence against women in contemporary women’s movements in India were the Mathura case in Maharashtra, and the Rammeza Bee case in Andhra Pradesh. Autonomous organisations like Saheli, Manushi, the Forum Against Oppression which emerged around the 1970s had been continuously mobilising issues pertaining to gender violence. However when the 1974 *Towards Equality* report presented evidences of existing gender inequality in education, income, access to health care and political representation, thereby instigating an upsurge in women’s movements across the country, the general issue of gendered violence seemed to gained very little attention (Katzenstein<sup>xii</sup> 61). In fact when the authors of *Towards Equality* report reflected upon their contribution in retrospect, they were surprised to realise that “...the issue of violence of crimes against women did not feature in our report as we have not investigated it” (qtd. in Katzenstein 62). 1980s proved to be a watershed moment when, catalysed by the political mobilisation around the Mathura case, women’s movements in India brought to the fore the issues of sexual violence against women. As feminist newsletters like *Manushi* and other journals carried letters of protests and personal accounts of women who had been victimised, the attention was steered towards violence on women within intimate spaces such as family, especially those related to ‘dowry deaths’ or ‘bride burning’. Analysing this sudden shift of women’s movement’s focus on violence Katzenstein points out that while violence was nothing new for political activists of 1970s who had already witnessed untellable violence of Partition and freedom movements and the violence erupting out of linguistic state protests of the 1950s and 1960s, “a discourse around ‘violence’ [was] common currency for movements that sought political attention” (ibid: 63). Moreover, feminist movements

around the globe could be seen addressing the issues of violence “where the movement has established a strong degree of autonomy from the state and party actors” (ibid: 63). Katzenshein is of the opinion that whenever the state or political parties have sponsored feminist concerns, concerns about violence against women are rarely a priority (ibid: 63). Hence as the state moved away from the concerns of women’s movements in India, the movements “opened a whole pandora’s box of domestic violence” with overwhelming evidence of abuse, battery, and a pervasive everyday violence against women and children which had become virtually normalised within families (Sen and Dhawan<sup>xiii</sup> 18). Violence which had been obscured and silenced gained public attention. The media attention that was gained by the movement’s mobilisation of violence against women was highly influenced by the movement’s construction of violence as a problem (Katzenshein 67). “The movement’s role in “naming” violence seemed to have a clear impact on press reporting” (ibid: 67) which, eventually, allowed women’s movements to emerge as signifying agents of identifying violence, while being instrumental in dwelling on the meanings and forms of violence.

While in the present times it has become almost impossible to undermine the presence of women within the Indian polity, the ubiquity of violence against women and children and other marginalised sections of society, continuously raises doubts as to how much might have been achieved by feminist movements. With the passing years as feminist voices have constantly been raising themselves against the hostility of the state against gender equality and social justice, minority rights, caste atrocities, trying to bring about change, the question of violence in all its previous forms and in renewed ways still seem to plague the cause for change. Every new act of violence which surfaces, brings with it unresolvable problems while thwarting any iota of advancement towards this end. Every new event of violence on women seems to create a moment which triggers questions on different forms of violence along with that of violence itself. The age of consent debate around which the women’s movements at the end of nineteenth century gathered force was the incident of the death of Phoolmoni, a girl of barely ten to eleven years of age, who was married to a man much older than her. Her husband forced himself upon her and she bled to death due to forced sex. Again, in the 70s and 80s there were the Mathura and Rammeza Bee cases of custodial rape which made feminists consider the issue of violence, especially sexual violence, followed by all other forms of violence, with renewed analysis. While this new

concentration on violence unearthed cases of horrific dowry deaths, stimulated legislative measures, influenced awareness, a cold night of December 2012 once again put feminist movements, their achievements and endeavour to question. The complexity of the Delhi gang rape which took the nation, and also the world, by storm, creating a state of exception, pointed a finger at what feminist movements had achieved, and if there was a requirement to clear the hazed lens and look at the issue of violence anew. An urgency has also been felt to question its insights as well as blindedness towards the issue of sexual violence or gendered violence or violence in itself in contemporary feminist politics. It became imperative to refurbish notions around violence and consider that which violence brings to the fore, and that which violence routinely obscures in order to function with impunity.

### **5.7. Indian women's detective fictions and the issue of violence**

Talking of violence could definitely lead to analysing detective fiction's intricate relationship with the idea of violence which becomes somewhat problematized with the entry of a woman detective. The genre's commitment to a masculine verisimilitude seems to rest on its treatment of violence as is depicted through the instances of violence, through its handling of violence and most important, through the victim of violence. All of these are loaded with cultural import which makes the structure almost impermeable for women who are mostly imagined as victims of violence. If at all a woman can be violent herself she must be the criminal, the *femme fatale*. This bind of the woman as either the victim or the criminal makes it quite problematic for the woman to gain entry as a detective in Indian fictions. She is in a double bind: while she must overturn the cultural image of a meek, docile, subservient woman who is the stock depiction of the traditional Indian woman, she also has to be convincing to the mass in order to be relatable. She has to critique the derogatory idea of transgressive woman by being a woman who transgresses conventions. Moreover, violence is a notion that women will always occupy differently than men, because of their experiential encounters with violence as part of everyday existence. Since such acts of violence tend to become a continuum which makes violent acts repetitive, violence becomes monotonous and evades recognition. Can a woman detective be so insulated as to be able to recognise such acts of violence when she might be imbricated within the same socio-cultural ideology of womanhood as others? Even if she is able to

recognise such violence, how does she do it and to what effect? For Prabhavati creating a woman detective in the 1950s seemed quite an ambitious act where she had had to constantly negotiate with social and cultural codes to make Krishna convincing as well as depict her as a 'new woman'. It is through the character and the adventures of Krishna that Prabhavati intends to apprise young women about the dangers lurking in the public spaces where they must venture for education and work. Hence, while bringing the women out in the public sphere in the character of Krishna, Prabhavati has also made it clear that it is an unsafe place for women; but the risk of venturing into this unsafety must be taken, thus defying violence of closure.

Krishna is, therefore, seen occupying the public space fearlessly with the grit to turn the circumstances to suit her, brandishing her gun for defense, or using her wit and courage to come out of situations. She not only urges other women to rise up from the stupor and claim the world fearlessly, she also tries to show the way. She fights with criminals for the lives of her dear ones, she does not hesitate to fire her gun when required, even killing criminals, and also faces the miscreants with courage enough to criticise and chastise them. Violence in Prabhavati's stories is mostly projected as large scale violence- moving from micro to macro level- where the security of the country is at stake. It is interesting to note that Prabhavati always makes her detective fall into trouble- she is kidnapped, imprisoned, physically hurt- but endures all situations with grit. However, it might not be conducive to attribute this endurance as 'masculine' since endurance of pain is quite ubiquitously a feminine imperative too. What is significant to note is that this violence does not cause a closure for her as she continues to use her faculties to emerge out of the situations while also being sensitive to help others who might need support. She can fearlessly talk about violence, quite unconventional for a woman. In *GP* after Mrs. Mitra's son has been kidnapped, she recalls the tales of such kidnapping and trafficking gangs who maim, blind, and physically distort children in order to make them beg or force them into criminal activities. When Mrs. Mitra almost swoons listening to tales of such atrocities, Krishna voices her concern, "You cannot just be afraid of these incident, *Mashima*, you must think beyond these incidents. Imagine how we are constantly losing our children, allowing them to go into oblivion. ...these gangs not only distort these children physically, but also pollute their minds beyond comprehension" (Prabhavati<sup>xiv</sup>, *GP*, 17), thus emerging with a feminist consciousness which identifies violence as more

than what is visible. This violence does not terrify her, but it enrages her, empowering her to risk her life to save Debu and a group of children from Khajahan's ill intentions of trafficking. She fights hand in hand with the police to ensure that the culprit is captured. She also implores the police to try and extract information about the recently trafficked women and children from Khajahan so that they may be saved. However, Byomkesh, who is a police detective, has always found ways to condone Krishna's fearlessness often by trying to censure her moves as a woman. At the end of *GP* he tells Krishna, "Such desperateness does not become a woman, Krishna" (ibid: 56), to which Krishna retorts, "May every woman of Bengal carry within her heart such bravery and courage to face violence. May Bengal become replete with brave mothers!" (ibid: 56). She encounters violence herself which allows her to transcend the effects of violence and evolve empowered.

In *KA*<sup>xv</sup> Krishna is engaged in recovering the 'mahakalchakra', allegedly stolen from Rajendra Prasad by the violent criminal Raja Rao. But in the course of the story she realises how greed and influence of Rajendra Prasad had forced the legitimate owners of the chakra to leave their symbol of religious pride behind and retreat into the jungle. They are forced to lead a secluded life due to systemic violence incurred upon them by the authorities who are under the pressures of Prasad's immense power and favours. It was also revealed that Rajendra Prasad is culpable enough to poison his father-in-law in order to take over his property, and to dislocate his wife and infant child to an unhealthy, secluded place in order to spread the rumour of their kidnapping by Rao. It is this place that costs the life of his infant boy which leads to his wife turning hysteric. However the violence upon the child and the woman is easily hushed up when the woman is brought home where she is expected to adjust to her husband's whims. Although there is a hue and cry about the freedom of women, this act of violence does not receive any space in the list of crimes committed by Prasad, except at the end, when Krishna sympathises with the bereaved woman. When Rajendra Prasad kills himself at the end, it is almost as if a moral retribution of all violent acts is exacted. The idea of a systemic abuser within intimate relations of the family seems to find a significant space in stories involving the woman detective where the whole spectrum of crimes, whether considered crime by law or not, seem to come to the fore. The way Krishna is able to get involved with women and children in trying to resolve the crimes, trying to extract clues from them, which are generally overlooked; she



follows a domestic method of detection. However her idea of violence does not receive a closure or goes on to create an illusion of an otherwise good world. It is a world where violence is also continuously directed towards her, although she is able to come out of it using her prowess.

There is a straight forward description of violence; a certain caricature used for violent men of lower class who often evoke the sense of monstrosity; whereas violent men of upper caste not only have a towering presence, but are also men of dignity like Raja Rao. There are also men like Rajendra Prasad who inflict violence within a known circle- his wife, child, father-in-law- whom he is supposed to protect. While this finds intimate links with patriarchy, it also negates the idea that only public spaces can be spaces of violence, and only strangers can perpetuate violence. Men like Raja Rao are, however, constructed as fallen heroes who evoke pity not only for themselves but for the system of which they are victims- victims of systemic violence. While Krishna is driven into the vortex of these problems, she is equipped with the awareness of a female consciousness to recognise the minor. As she has to consistently fight for her stand and legitimacy as a detective, the author seems to continuously present justification for the idea of female usurpation. In fact in the second advertisement for the book *Prabhabati* went on to attest for the reputable background of Krishna and also assert that her involvement in the public sphere is done with utmost care to not harm her 'womanly dignity'. Thus the female detective is herself placed in a precarious position where she becomes an object of ideological violence imbricated within the societal structures. While the author tries to counter the prejudices directed towards her by making her vocal about women rights, the fact remains that in all of the stories she has to assert herself, perform feats which intend to shock and overturn the ingrained prejudices and emerge victorious not only by solving the problem but also by proving her claim to being a detective, a gendered idea interred within the idea of the patriarchal and masculinist state structure.

Krishna is sensitive to the insensitiveness of violence as well. In *KA* while she sympathises with Sandhya who has been the victim of her husband's culpability, she also finds no justification in the violent death Rajendra chooses for himself at the threat of being imprisoned. She does not relish in violent ends just because it is deserved; she realises the foolhardiness of the endless game of violence which renders lives imbecile.

She confronts Raja Rao in *KA* after hearing stories of his immensely violent acts which touches people of both his community and outside. She questions him about his integrity as a human who can unleash such gruesome violence on innocent women and children. Raja Rao has reportedly burnt an entire village of his own community when some people of the village tried to betray him to the police. Krishna is appalled at this, and demands an explanation from Rao when he tries to impress himself as a man of dignity and self-respect. She tells him: “I cannot believe a man who kills in playful whims” (Prabhabati, *KA*, 71). When Raja Rao informs Krishna about the systemic violence which has relegated his people to the margins, and has forced them to be violent, Krishna listens to him with utmost sympathy and ruminates over the many faces of violence which, however, has one end- destruction. When Yu-yin, the dacoit who had killed her parents, dies at the end of *HP*<sup>xvi</sup> she cannot help but rue the loss of the life of an intelligent man who could have been beneficial to the society had he not decided to walk down the wrong path which brings about his doom.

As women’s movements steered itself towards a self-conscious critique of gender politics, family emerged as the site of oppression and suppression for the marginalised. In Bhattacharya’s Mitin stories criminality is no longer considered as an aberration and violence is not extrinsic to intimate spaces and relations. However, since Mitin stories basically targeted a juvenile audience the criminal acts were not complicated. The violence in these stories, besides the physical, visible injuries can be regarded as violence of trust in intimate relations, a sense of violence that pervaded especially after the façade of safety and security within family circles was unveiled. In *HM*<sup>xvii</sup> when Mitin reveals that Rustomji’s most trusted employee has kidnapped Rony, Rustomji’s son, to appease his vengeance against Rustomji, the narrative follows Rustomji’s reaction: “Not a word came out of Rustomji. Rage, complain, irritation- no retort. He left the room. Slowly” (Bhattacharya, *HM*, 225). The betrayal of trust comes back again and again in Suchitra’s stories creating a sense of precarity in what people considered as family, or the extended family. In *JB*<sup>xviii</sup>, although the housekeeper is found guilty of being the person behind the abnormal activities in Mr. Jonathan’s house, the children of Mr. Jonathan are also found guilty of betraying the trust of their father for money. As Mitins set off on the trail to solve the mysteries brought to her, she finds herself getting into murkier family secrets which seem impossible to control. These crimes carry on in a continuum often escaping the eye because these are

presented in the garb of everyday violence that evades notice. In *AH*<sup>xix</sup> while Mitin is able to discover that Mr. Arakiel had hidden the family diamond inside the aquarium, she also finds out how every person associated with Mr. Arakiel was in the look out of that diamond so much so that most of them had taken the keys from the dead body of Mr. Arakiel to open the safe which presumably had the diamond. Most significant turns out to be the revelation concerning Jasmine, the niece of Mr. Arakiel whom he had adopted and looked after with all his love and care, but who was slow poisoning Mrs. Arakielin order to usurp the property. She mixes mercury in the candles she makes and offers to Mrs. Arakiel to be lit in front of her uncle's pictures, thus using an age old method of slow poisoning. The narrative quickly moves from a scene of joy at the discovery of the diamond, a mark of family prestige, to numbness. When Mitin tells Mrs. Arakiel to decide whether to punish Jasmine or forgive her, Mrs. Arakiel breaks down in tears (Bhattacharya, *AH*, 71). Jasmine's crime is the crime spurred by greed, but Mitin is hopeful that Jasmine would repent for her deed and would be forgiven. There is no heroism in such revelations, but an underlying pensiveness which, however, does not make the woman detective cynical about world order. She remains hopeful that forgiveness can suture the fissures.

#### 5.7.1. At the centre stage of violence

Contemporary Indian women's detective fictions dwell on the various facets of violence as it emerges within the Indian polity ruffling up our complacency about being able to comprehend violence. Set basically in the urban spaces of growing India, these fictions, by women writers featuring women detectives, try to unpack the contours of violence as it affects our day to day living. The nature and distribution of these different forms of violence continuously challenge the distinction made between traditional and culture specific violence and non-cultural or everyday forms of violence. The fictions deftly traverse the course of unpacking the macro and micro practices of violence which continue to affect our day to day exchanges in the family, the workplace, the community. These fictions are careful to realise that forms of violence cannot be isolated from each other and not all actions can be retributive in the present state structure which has always been violent in its ways. The thin lines between the different forms of violence become shadowy most of the time creating a confluence of violent form which point at violence that is deeply entrenched within the

Indian community living. The presence of a woman detective in this murky world of crime and violence further complicates the issue as violence seems to be an issue women are able to relate with generally, especially in an Indian setting where the conventional strictures of life cannot be so easily toppled without raising eyebrows and risking one's dignity. Hence an analysis of the women detectives' negotiations with these different forms of violence may open up another dimension of their subjective formations while allowing scrutiny into the genre's commitment to the idea of a just world. The discussion will proceed from here, knowing full well that the overlaps cannot be filtered out and with no intention of doing so, under four forms of violence—sexual violence, gendered violence, mediated violence, violence for violence's sake. The distinction made between sexual and gendered forms of violence is based on a subtle understanding that while sexual violence is definitely gendered, all gendered violence might not be sexual. This is so because for the sake of furthering the discussion and bringing in the subtle understandings in these forms of violence, sex here is being considered as biology while gender is being considered as a social construct. Hence gendered violence might include differential behaviour to those who lie outside the normative arrangement of sexuality. Mediated form of violence is the violence that is triggered by the media which in turn reflects at the consumption practices of an Indian audience. This is often the most irresponsible form of violence that is brought into the drawing rooms with the intention of warning or creating awareness, but which in turn unleashes more violence. Violence for violence's sake is a form that evades explanation where violence is perpetuated for the sheer pleasure of being violent.

#### 5.7.1.1. **The sexual turn**

The issue of sexual violence has been continuously associated with the rights and wrongs of women since a long time now. But, as John, suggests it is perhaps the most elusive subject that provides little understanding even after it has been continuously researched, hogging media and consequent political attention all the time. As the gang rape of December 2012 in the streets of the capital of the country created unprecedented mobilisation in both small and large scale, it once again brought the issue of sexual violence in the mainstream of public life in a way that decades of agitation could not have achieved (John, “#MeToo”, 140). The disruption caused by

this 'event' created responses that cannot be gauged. The label of a 'state of exception' which was hurled at the incident could only make one with critical tools of analysing the event rethink the very assumptions of violence and more so, sexual violence. While sexual violence is continuously being recognised everywhere and has been ubiquitously accepted as an everyday form of violence, especially after the revelations made through movements like #MeToo, it is gaining visibility that seems truly unending and intensely problematic.

The huge mobilisation following the gang rape and the responses of the state by the quick setting up of Justice Verma committee and the rapid enactments of Criminal Amendment Act (2013) and Sexual Harrasment at Workplace Act (2013) clearly shows that there is a pervasive unacceptability of the sexual violence of rape (John, "#MeToo", 143). However, Nivedita Menon<sup>xx</sup> points out that the distinction lies in the reasons for considering rape as a violent act. For patriarchal forces, rape is a crime against honour, against family, and for feminists rape is crime against "the autonomy and bodily integrity of a woman" (Menon 113). In patriarchal practice, rape is a moment that changes the destiny of women forever. Normal life becomes impossible for a raped woman and the only way to avoid rape is decreasing public visibility of women and following codes whenever such visibility is required. John suggests that the Delhi rape case dangerously cemented this popular myth about women that "the greatest danger to women lay in the stranger lurking in the streets after nightfall" ("#MeToo", 140). However, there have been incidents where the rapist has been advised/decreed by law to marry the woman he has violated, because, it seems, marriage resolves the issue of consent. While feminists vehemently oppose such notions of chastity, honour and this premium laden on the institution of marriage, they consider that "the raped woman does not lose honour, the rapist does" (Menon 116). While prompt redress by the Indian judicial system is considered to be the most essential way for checking sexual violence of all sorts, feminists also feel that death penalty cannot be the only way to curb such crimes (John, "#MeToo", 140). The aftermath of the incident of the Delhi gang rape brought in fresh directions and insights into feminist research and understandings by going against commonplace understandings.

While taking up the familiar path of demanding legal justice and calling for an end to victimisation, which often tries to initiate processes of witch hunt by all the stakeholders of the patriarchal system who are involved, the campaign also asserted “women’s rights to desire, to freedom, to autonomy, and spoke out in the language of sexual rights” (John, “#MeToo”, 140). “Azadi”, the Urdu word for freedom, found new popularity, an idea that is not associated with sexual violence before (ibid: 140). Researches revealed that in the year 2011-12, the national records on rape claimed that 98% of FIRs lodged at police stations found the perpetrator to be someone known to the victim of rape (ibid: 140), which not only overturns the stranger myth, but also makes one speculate how power, class, caste boundaries might come into play in the perpetuation of such atrocities which are mostly silenced by family, communal and state structures. Swaminathan’s *TSG*<sup>xxi</sup> brings in the character of Priya who has been a victim of marital rape for six years but does not complain. Her mother-in-law had tried to intervene but she begged her to be off. Her own mother had, obviously, asked Priya to adjust. However, Mithilesh’s mother, Ahilyabai, could not bring it upon herself to speak to her husband because it would shatter his pride to know that his son had committed such a crime against the order of honour. The atrocity continued till Mithilesh’s death leaving a deep impact on both Priya and her little son, Jai. When Sita expressed her horror at the atrocity, trying to analyse what might have happened had Mithilesh not died, Lalli remarks with absolute coldness, “Nothing. They would all have lived their lives out” (Swaminathan, *TSG*, 116). The silencing caused by marital rape, which is in fact not even legalised as crime by the IPC, is strange but true. Lalli explains, “The terror of it never leaves the victim and the silence of others makes certain that it never goes away...Every one of these [police, courts, family, doctors] is complicit with the rapist” (ibid: 117). It is the pervasiveness of such misogynist culture that severely restricts woman’s emancipation. Thus, *azadi* becomes a legitimate claim for women against being violated sexually. Later in the story it is revealed that when Priya was almost trying to keep the fears behind and settle down for a new life with Anil Chauhan, she is mistakenly kidnapped by two men, who rape her, only to channelize their anger at the mistake made and consequent financial loss, on a woman’s body which is consider disposable. Priya hides that from all, continuously trying to exonerate her kidnappers, distancing herself from Anil as she too has imbibed the patriarchal understanding of rape as something which can destroy the life of a woman.

This is a form of symbolic violence of masculine domination which makes the victim timid, as if it is her fault that she is being violated. Lalli says, “Priya shows the usual pattern of a victim of abuse. Perfect self-containment and composure, and a need to ingratiate or exonerate the abuser. A refusal to empathize with the victim, any victim, even her own son” (ibid: 240); Priya does not protest when Jai is burnt by her mother.

Sexual violence, therefore, has a potency that is greater than the actual violence of the act or the physical damage inflicted (Menon 140). As soon as violence is identified as ‘sexual’ the damage caused by the attack is radically transformed. The sense of fear, shame, terror which is made to accompany sexual violence is so constructed that it is considered as the most terrifying and most humiliating form of attack, especially for a woman. Durga, in *WTN*<sup>xxii</sup>, after living a life in the claustrophobic ambience of the Atwal household, kills everyone under the influence of her tuition teacher, Harpreet Sir, who is actually in love with her elder sister, Sharda. In order to avenge the cruelties laden on Sharda, Harpreet instigates the teenager Durga to murder her entire household, promising to marry her. However, after the vicious act is committed, Harpreet convinces Durga that because as they would need money to start a new life in Delhi, it is important that Durga gets all the property as the sole heir of the Atwals. To this end, he injures Durga seriously and even rapes her violently to make the scenery of violence more plausible. Durga survives the incident, is arrested and shuts herself in silence as she realises there are very few people who would want her to come out of this murk alive. The betrayal in all fronts, especially by Harpreet, shatters her completely. The impact of sexual violence in popular imagination is that it reaches one of the deepest aspects of one’s real and private self so that a sense of violation on the whole being threatens one’s belief in the uniqueness of selfhood (Menon 141). This is how sexual violence is made a state of exception, even when violence becomes part of everyday existence, as in the case of Durga.

“This mystification around sexuality as the truest, deepest expression of selfhood is what we must contest”, Menon asserts (141). It is this patriarchal idea of violation that needs to be reformed, and immunity to this fear must be built upon. One is reminded of Mahashweta Devi’s short story, “Draupadi” where Dopdi Mehjen rips off her clothes disrobing herself and walks up to officer Senanayak who had ordered his army men to rape her in order to extract information. Her defiance and resistance is

hurled at the patriarchal ideology which considers rape as a way to coerce women to subordinate. It is this idea that sexual violence is a unique, irreplaceable form of violence which should shatter one's will to live is what needs to be countered. Durga is adopted by Simran who unties the knots of the case, and is seen living the life of a carefree teenager in the next instalments of the series, although cautious of how pain and suffering can be transformed through love. Lalli tells Priya, "Tell him [Anil]. Let him help you live, Priya", asking Priya to realise rape is not a violation of the selfhood; it is a crime, violent as any other crime of coercion (Swaminathan, *TSG*, 240).

#### 5.7.1.2. Gendered violence

The foundational and systemic feature of all contemporary patriarchies is violence, where women's consent to patriarchy is often an effect of the anticipation of violence (Sangari<sup>xxiii</sup> 326). As women are active agents in both inciting and inflicting interpersonal and institutional violence, it is suggested that patriarchies equally rest on women to ensure that patriarchal violence continues to percolate through the legitimisation of ideologies. It is important to understand that patriarchy is not about the rule of men over women but is about systemic structures. Gendered violence is seen as working in collusion with the notion of social division, where it reinforces divisions and also becomes crucial in the perpetuation and emergence of inequalities in contemporary India. As such, all dominant agencies of violence, working in isolation or in intersection- class, caste, family, religious community and the state- are caught up in this logic (Sangari 326).

Gendered violence cannot be separated from material consideration which tries to control the reproductive body, unevenly distributes wealth, perpetuates caste and class based gender and sexual violence. One of the most common features of these kinds of violent acts is that they quickly produce the sense of the other body, mostly the other woman, while also being symbolic and pedagogic in a way that would teach every woman a lesson (ibid: 327). In this way gendered violence also creates the other within one's own. This suggests the slippages that occur from "the domestic space of the family to public space which allows for, or actively assists in the circulation of the modalities of violence" (ibid: 328). Each type of violence carries its own legitimising device which is obviously intertwined with other such devices like family, community, caste or state. All these compose a circuit, and cannot always be thought of in isolation.



Violent acts in the name of religion, community or nation are often mutually reinforcing and produce complex symbologies that need to be unpacked (ibid: 328).

Indian women's detective fiction cannot but be sensitive to the increasing graph of gendered violence which is ubiquitously inflicted upon women, children and on those who lie outside the normative understanding of gender and sexuality. While class, caste, religion, disability and other such coordinates enmesh to create a complex grid for understanding gendered violence, it seems to perpetuate itself via new modalities every passing day, making such violence incomprehensible. Legislative measures taken to curb gendered violence fall flat when considered through the lens of common everyday life where ideologies are deeply entrenched. Desai's *WTN* is a story steeped in gendered atrocity directed towards women in a highly insulated patriarchal ambience where power, religion, geographical location (it is set in a provincial town of Jullundhur), institutions function in tandem to create submissive women. Simran, Desai's woman detective, left this small town of her childhood to escape its constrictive ambience which does not allow women to move out of a given framework, thus stunting growth. But for the unfortunate ones like Durga, Sharda, Ammiji, their mother, living in the place amidst its patriarchal setup is to allow violence to be normalised. Ranging from female foeticide to keeping sex slaves, the women in the house of Atwals, a wealthy, aristocratic family, witness, participate and are coerced to participate in the violence that is unleashed. Their fields are full of skeletons of infants who had been victims of female infanticide. They run clinics in the name of charity hospitals where illegal sex determination allows female foeticide. Sharda and Durga were also buried alive, but they refused to die, dug up by dogs and had to be given space in the house. However, they lived a life of silence. In Durga's words, "I always tried my hardest not to give anyone any trouble" (Desai, *WTN*, 68). Binny, the daughter-in-law, who escaped to Southall to save her unborn baby girl, also tells Simran about the compulsive son-obsession of the Atwals which forces her to flee in order to escape aborting her unborn girl child. The sons, however, are allowed to grow wild, indulge in drug abuse, sex abuse, while the girls are routinely chastised because they are girls, the bearer of family honour. Durga says about her brothers, "My brothers were not as good-looking, but no one cared really, they were Boys and that was enough" (ibid: 35). The family tends to become the most atrocious space which retains gendered violence through precipitation and repetition of action and also by silencing

any form of transgression. The terror of routine violence not only silences them, it also makes them bear the burden of guilt for the perpetuation of the violence upon them.

Family is the site of power which imbibes within its structure the social and cultural ideologies and coerces the marginalised to submit to it. Since a family cannot help but be patriarchal, transgression is dealt with severity and utmost violence. The coercive forces within the idea of family are entwined with the ideas of class, caste, community, and other such social and cultural categories so that it becomes difficult to escape its forces of coercion. Hence transgressing the mesh of norms becomes almost impossible. Sharda in *WTN* transgresses the strictures of the family by loving her tuition teacher, Harpreet, who belongs to a lower class and caste. When her pregnancy is discovered she is not only locked up and tortured in the name of family prestige, she existence becomes shadowy till she is wiped away completely from the face of the Atwal family. However, the tortures do not kill her; she is allowed to give birth because she carries a son and is left demented in some remote asylum, the price she must pay for transgressing the bounds of family dictates. A similar case is found in Swaminathan's *INK*<sup>xxiv</sup> where the rebel Maybelle is tortured by her family for relentlessly falling in love with the Muslim man, Aaftab Shiraazi. She, like Sharda, is tied in chains and is allowed to fade from the face of the family. Both these women are treated like beasts, where, unable to contain them, their families leave no stones unturned "...so that *it* should become natural" (Swaminathan, *INK*, 171), where 'it' means death. Both these women are considered ungrateful for what the family does for them. Maybelle's father is surprised that Maybelle did not relent even when they used best quality chain to imprison her. "Everything we did was for her own good", Maybelle's father retorted pleading not guilty (ibid: 170). Both the women are considered blots in the family's face for following their will. The family, however, being the patriarchal institution finds no problem in using brutalities against such disobedience. In fact neither does law; Maybelle's family members are released shortly after their arrest; the Atwals carry on with impunity till they are murdered by Durga.

Maybelle and Sharda, the transgressive women, must be othered in order to allow this deluge of torture to land upon them and also to allow their own families to justify their stands of protecting the honour of the family by sacrificing their wild girls at the alter of community. However, the ones who are already othered on the basis of

caste, class, religion, sexuality, gendered violence is perpetuated with impunity. Gendered violence can reach unreasonable heights when coupled with caste, class as the tool of atrocity. In Desai's *WTN* Manubhai, the servant of the house, brings in his 'daughters' so that Durga's brothers, high on drugs and power can have some 'fun'. Binny is surprised to find them in the outhouse one day where they cry when she tries to talk to them because "...no one had tried to speak to them before" and they already had children, although one of the girls was barely thirteen (Desai, *WTN*, 133). The violence laden on these girls is not even taken into account as they are merely female bodies in a patriarchal ideology of desire. The othering which emerges out of class and caste distinctions hardly allows any humanity to persist. In Swaminathan's *GL*<sup>xxv</sup> the little girls from the slum were brutalised by the boys of the rich families living in the skyscrapers adjoining the slums without any morsel of care because "They [the six year old girls] weren't from good families. Their parents didn't care if they lived or died and soon they would all be whores anyway" (Swaminathan, *GL*, 180), one of the perpetrators explained without a twitch. The families of the little girls, on the other hand, are constantly seen fighting their nerves to come to terms with the horrific deaths of their little ones. The gap induced in the realities of life by such differences in class and caste sometimes makes one feel about the unreality of one's own stand, inducing scope for self-criticism.

It is important to note that while talking of gendered violence one must talk of men who are mostly considered being perpetrators in the universal discourse of violence. Indian women's detective fictions while talking of gendered violence also talks of violence perpetuated on subjects, other than women, because of their gendered positionalities. Masculinity is a construct decreed for humans born male which not only bestows them with a conditioning of power, but also makes sure they lead their lives within the construct to a point of oppression. Swaminathan's *MM*<sup>xxvi</sup> presents the case of Vinay Dasgupta, the husband of the relentless criminal, Sitara, who lives in daze of his wife's oppression. Sitara is a psychotic murderer who plants all circumstantial evidence against Vinay so that if any arrests would ever be made, Vinay would be behind the bars. She creates a narrative to convince Vinay about the crimes he never committed so much so that Vinay is at the verge of suicide when Lalli and Savio find him. At the end, Vinay realises, "...that emptiness inside her [Sitara]...the hard cold shell of her. I couldn't face that. ...I had to live with her, and the only way I could do

was- this”, Vinay says looking up at the picture of Madonna in monochrome which would quell doubts of an anguished husband regarding the various colours of his beloved wife (Swaminathan, *MM*, 246). In *GL* Swaminathan projects the life of Subhendu who is tortured into oppression by his maniac father and his ritualistic raping and killing of six-year-old girls to reach some bizzare state of salvation. As his father takes him to Cattle Island to look at the pit where he hurled all his ‘sacrifices’, Subhendu can feel oppression settling like a tight collar at his throat (*GL* 168). He is beyond himself when he comes to know that his father had fed him with the meat of the little girls he had raped and murdered, just as his father had raped and murdered his own daughter, his first sacrifice. The sonorous effect of this revelation makes it impossible for him to bear the sound of his heartbeat. He shoots himself to escape that human sound, and his father calls him a coward (Swaminathan, *GL*, 169). Just as men who do not fit into the reigning ideology of masculinity are constantly adjudged as lesser humans, people who stand outside the normative arrangement of gender and sexuality must often suffer violence directed towards them by their families. Ankush Katarkar in *INK* being a gay cannot be accepted by his traditional parents so much so that they let him die unattended and in misery when he contracted AIDS. In *TSOI*<sup>xxvii</sup> Vishnu is the gay man who had to suffer repeated humiliation at the hands of people in power just because he could not fit in with them and did not partake in their ‘fun’. Violence of ideology can hardly be combatted by external factors.

One of the best documented player of violence is the state where its patriarchal structure interlocks with family, community and religion to perpetuate immense violence which may be gendered or otherwise. Police, army, legal system and all other forms of state machinery collude with other devices to perpetuate irrevocable violence. Prathama Banerjee<sup>xxviii</sup> points out that that since liberalism allows state to be an agency which, by absorbing and containing violence within itself, makes society possible, “the state assumes monopoly of violence and post-facto redeploys it, in a selective and regulated manner...in order to ensure liberty and security of life, person and property” (Banerjee *Seminar*). Banerjee further states that when one talks of state one does it in a particular way where the state appears “as a single, coherent and focalised entity which functions like an agent with intentionality, exercising violence through subordinate instruments such as the police and the army” (*Seminar*). But in the common man’s encounter of a state it appears as “disassembled into an uneven network of embodied

agents and institutions...and disembodied ideas as legality, illegality, violence and development, democracy and justice” (ibid: *Seminar*). It is because of this that state violence is always seen as violence exercised by “powerful men and exclusive institutions- officials, constables, soldiers, ‘big men’ with political connections...simultaneously in their public and private capacities, wielding both the power of law and the power of caste, community and gender” (Banerjee *Seminar*). As such social violence gets coupled with state violence to create an irreversible form of violence which becomes impossible to negotiate with.

The stories repeatedly direct their doubts and tribulations against the machinery of the state epitomised in police officials like Ramnath (*WTN*), or politicians like Vinay Gupta (*TSOI*), or representatives of religious communities like Father Malcolm (*INK*). Religious faith often has a lot to contribute to the escalation of gendered violence. While the violence that was unleashed on Maybelle had medical support provided by the culpable Doctor Kothari, who designated her mad and gave medicines to ‘control’ her, the ultimate sanction came from the religious authority possessed by Father Malcolm. Besides that there is ‘Rassiwala’. Dr. Q remarks, “Any Indian household in trouble is a prime target for fraudsters of all sorts- swamis, fakirs, jyotish, and ...witches” (Swaminathan, *INK*,254). The ‘Rassiwala’ emerges as a persistent voice in the entire story continuously guiding people like Aaftab to carry on with his murders of the troublesome women so that he can gain some peace. It seems to Dr. Q that the exorcist who had arrived to calm the ‘mad’ Maybelle planned her brutish imprisonment (ibid: 254). These systemic structures function through a founding inconsistency which extract consent of women in lieu of offering protection, “an offer they repeatedly violate in order to secure, reproduce and perpetuate themselves” (Sangari 328). As such the state continues to violate its own citizens, the caste group violates its own members and families violate their own women. “The promise of protection gives them the right to injury!” (ibid: 328).

The common ground among feminists is marked by the recognition that gendered power relations oppress women and do not allow them to attain their full potential. However, the manner in which these power relations operate in specific contexts and the way they intersect with other power relations often raise problematic questions. When can a woman be considered a victim needing protection, and when can

she be called an agent engaging in power and carving out her own space? Gendered violence is also associated with sex work and commercial surrogacy. However, the idea of a victimised woman seems to muddle up when characters like Sitara (*MM*) and Lola (*P3M<sup>xxix</sup>*) emerge who enter into sex trade by their own volition and are often found to be empowered, morality being out of point here. To look at this from the perspective of freedom of choice might not be appropriate, says Menon, as “the freedom to choose is never absolute” and is often to be exercised within strict boundaries defined by economic class, by race and caste and gender (175). Both Sitara and Lola are pushed into sex trade by the men they trusted or loved. Once in the trade they remained there after they realised the power it had given them, which they could readily use and abuse. The idea of commodification runs through many of the debates emerging from the agency/victimhood dilemma where commodification leads to the women’s body becoming an object of male desire. But in a world where everything is commercialised- from sex to intellect- this idea of commodification as bringing up vulnerability does not hold good. The idea of commodification ignores human labour and only looks at the finished product, that which is produced as commodity which does not take into account human agency, will, volition. Menon argues that to think of advertising, pornography or sex work as commodification of women’s body i.e. women’s participation in this work as commodities alone, is to deny the fact that women are also at times part of the contract (179). Lola is severely abused because of her profession by everyone around her which ultimately leads to her murder by a man who has been exploiting the benefits of bringing women into the trade. Women are exploited, no doubt, but then all work under capitalism is exploitative. Choice of work is severely limited in the labour market for women, and in some cases, choice does not even exist. But what must be a feminist concern is to neutralise the forces of violence as much as possible by demanding proper conditions of work, respectability and security for women. Therefore it becomes essential to remove the stigma attached to sex work which renders a woman loose, characterless and disposable. However, the vulnerabilities are undeniable making empowerment a problematic proposition.

Commercial Surrogacy is another profession in which the women’s body is no less commodified, but the question of choice and agency also lurks behind it. There are ethical concerns related to this work which leads to tremendous physical and emotional stress in women who undergo this process. There is also an entire gamut of power

relations which surrogacy has opened up where the relatively powerless women from poorer parts of the globe are used for bearing children for the wealthy and heterosexual and homosexual couples. Feminists have long argued how commercial surrogacy subordinates women by making them reproductive objects and reproductive commodities. While these tend to dehumanise women into machines, it also been criticised from the perspective of becoming agential for women. However they are clearly aware of the gendered violence that this industry runs on which needs to be named, confronted and rectified. The surrogates in Desai's *OOL*<sup>xxx</sup> also come from obscure background to fill in the fertility clinics in the heart of Delhi where they are apparently looked after. Secluded from their families for months together, secluded from each other in rooms which have blaring white walls, a comfortable bed and a television, life is quite unbearable for them. Then, there are oppressive men like Rohit who unscrupulously exploit women of their families in order to make a quick buck. He hurls Sonia into prostitution first, and then into surrogacy where she must carry the baby of Vineet Bhai, the health minister, in her womb. Sonia is forced into the work. "She felt like an animal with no feelings, as far as he was concerned" (Desai, *OOL* 294). She felt used, although she had once realised that the money the job offered might allow her to purchase her freedom. However, the cruel, exploitative industry which often treats women as reproducing machines, bodies with no human attributes, whatsoever, pushes the limits in case of Preeti forcing her to bear two babies consecutively without allowing her tired body to heal. The menaces of the industry are brought out, but just as no violence ever finds a closure, the doctor behind the crime is left with a warning. Freedom comes with conditions, and for women the conditions are always few and far between.

#### 5.7.1.3. **Mediatished violence**

Media has always been a powerful tool for conferring visibility and language to issues, while obscuring others. With rapid changes in the technological front, media stands out as the most crucial tool for generating opinion, confronting differences, adjudging events, and creating sensitivity. Media is still the most trusted site for disseminating truth because its presentation of an event is always corroborated with facts that follow a flowchart- a sense of logic and reason providing the analysis with scientific potential. Its gaze is omnipresent, sometimes beneficial and at others

dangerous. However, this scientific factuality allows media to create a surface understanding of a truth seeker. As such media can mobilise masses in ways that might be unprecedented, every time such mobilisation takes place.

In the present age of hyper visibility and media performativity, truths are constructed. Social media is increasingly becoming a tool in the hands of urban middle class who have been able to create this culture of visibility which often does not require ethical and moral sanction. For an awakened urban middle class, the malleability of social media provides a platform to voice out opinions from various fronts. Hence this platform has been useful in performing protests and movements against issues and concerns which have impacted the growing sense of difficulties that are present within the Indian polity. Among the problems which find an active audience in the social media are the issues related to gender since there has been prolonged efforts to make such issues find visibility. While media has been able to contribute in the formation of opinions, in generating pressure to affect the stance or language that goes out to create mass opinion, it has often been considered reflective of privileges on the basis of class, caste, race and gender which in turn makes these opinions biased, blurring those which are, thereby, created as others. The patriarchal assumptions of media, especially related to issues of sexual violence or women in general tend to obscure the politics behind such violence, while the opinions generated by media precipitate patriarchy in all its forms. Media routinely shapes narratives around incidents to the extent that such incidents gain a state of exception while similar incidents find no visibility because of reasons that are unfathomable. Media exonerates culprits, creates victims, demands justice and claims to be above all of this, the omnipresent surveyor of truth. It is interesting to see how flash journalism of the present times tend to jump from one incident to the other with such rapidity that nothing gets a closure, and public is burdened with excess of news while journalism evades responsibility. Media is constantly used and abused in varied forms. While it presents an important platform to explicate issues of violence, create opinions, mobilise actions, it also produces effects which are far from being essentialised. Not revolutionary always, most of these opinions perpetuate greater violence because ideology, as Zizek puts it, is not beyond the socio-cultural political lives that we live. As such, media continues to play with these inherent ideologies that inform the mass, who are also inherently patriarchal. Hence, while media can definitely be blamed for shaping news, the crowd which



consumes such news cannot be exonerated from perpetuating violence in the same lines as media. Irresponsibility is on both sides then, the producer and the consumer of news, where both are motivated by inherent patriarchies that often tend to direct brutish violence against anything that is beyond normative.

*WTN* presents this sensation mongering media which easily turns Durga into a witch overnight without even allowing her any scope for defence. Durga is scandalised because the violence she has perpetuated inevitably makes her guilty. She emerges as the ungrateful daughter of an affluent family which was known for their charitable works. The six kilos of news clippings, containing the ‘details’ of the case, which Simran must go through appears to be filled with only the scene of crime with gory details, in order to feed the violence-seeking consumer (Deasi, *WTN*, 8). A horrific murder, a high profile case and a young woman at the altar of sacrifice are apt ingredients to let the media loose upon collecting such ‘details’ which are also acceptable for a public that is inscribed in the faulty ideologies of honour, shame, and violence. Amrinder, officer Ramnath Singh’s wife, is flabbergasted when Simran asks her to help Durga, “Help the girl? Who would want to help a murderer?” (ibid: 43). Durga has been adjudged culprit even before she is proven guilty by what seems through a media trial. Durga is herself convinced that had there been no media pressure this case would not have reached the high profile status and she would have been manhandled by the state machinery without exemption (90)- exemplifying how the media may manipulate ways to meet its demands of supplying a spectacle of violence to its consumers who await such opportunities.

The horrific act of rape and murder, Sita calls it “a spectacular mess” (Swaminathan, *GL*, 11), comes to the fore when a police officer divulges the cases to a journalist. Amidst the hullabaloo that is created, Lalli and Sita both experience the claustrophobia that can be generated both by irresponsible reportage and consumption. Holding the state machinery responsible, the media, here represented by the character of Seema Aggarwal, continuously slanders Savio almost turning him into a corrupt officer as he refuses to give her ‘details’. The ‘full story’ of the incident that Seema pens down contains horrific details of the brutal killings of the little girls which makes Sita tremble. The thin line between voyeurism and awareness seems to have been smudged by such a narration which makes violence look glamorous and scintillating.

Sita concludes, “Every time someone reads this, these children will be brutalised all over again” (ibid: 24). The narration of violence thus becomes a problematic act which transfixes one within details without bringing the wider canvas of violence into picture. When Lalli says, “Violence is pornography- and not just for the criminals” (ibid: 24), she is consciously pointing at lust in the consumption of violence which makes such reportages inevitable and recurrent without making them responsible. As such these acts can be considered equally violent and like all acts of violence are to be considered “acts of free will” (ibid: 25).

However, the media reportage cares for none of these sensitivity in the era of ‘newsflash’ and ‘breaking news’. While media can be quite a powerful weapon for change as could be seen during women’s movements, media also tends to project issues without perspective which allows wired ideas to reverberate among those addressed. When Sita visits the meeting at ‘Writers for Change’ she feels disgusted at the kind of feminism media can provoke which always leads to self-pity instead of trying to reach out to the larger world around with empathy. Most were pouring in for more details as it was “an unusual and perverse crime” (Swaminathan, *GL*, 78) which fascinated their sensibilities of brutality. Sita mused, “I lacked the courage...to tell those women what a misogynistic bunch of voyeurs they were...if their only response to the pain of others was to trot out sorry tales of their own” (ibid: 82).

Like glamourised feminism which ultimately could lead to nothing but more misogyny, glamourised violence leads to more violence. In his confession letter, Rajiv writes, “We had many followers on Twitter, and though we didn’t tweet details of all our projects, we were admired. I enjoyed that” (Swaminathan, *GL*, 180) supplementing the darkest fears of Lalli that violence can be pornographic, and not just for the criminals. Lalli, however, uses the same board first, to trap the killers, and then to diffuse their heroism in a live broadcast of their humiliation by the public. Media, one of the most powerful weapons of recent times, mostly allows surface realities to come up which could turn a perfect loser into a hero. Media creates its narratives conveniently targeting patriarchal ideologies which are hard to dislodge.

#### 5.7.1.4. Violence for Violence’s sake

Does violence always have a reason beyond itself? The structure of detective fictions is built to fathom into the reasons for a violent act, which must be external to

the act, related to a past of deprivation, pain or suffering- in other words, to a past of other forms of social, cultural, moral or ethical violence- which is able to provide the narrative with a certain closure. If the reason for violence is found and rectified, then violence is assumed to be neutralised. While the everyday forms of violence, which are deeply entrenched within our daily living, direct towards the idea of violence as a continuum which creates monotony, it might also generate the other idea of violence- violence as exciting. The excitement that this violence tends to generate might not be related to the excitement of publicity alone, a sense of mass visibility, but could be hormonal, inducing pleasure. This idea of violence inevitably links violence to the question of desire. Anup Dhar<sup>xxxi</sup> in his essay, “What if there is violence in Pleasure?” provocatively rethinks our relationship with violence from the vantage point of analysing the question of desire in violence which inaugurates two aspects: one, that the subject desires too much which makes it violent; another, that the subject desires violence (Dhar *Seminar*). Hence while sexual violence may be understood as “crossing the limit of consensual”, it might also be seen as sex being used as a tool for violence, especially on the body of a woman, in order to abuse power, logic, reason and any other faculties that is intended to keep society under constraints. In this respect, violence becomes a power that is used to transcend the power of the law, the normative.

Again, Dhar enquires, what if violence, especially sexual violence, can be seen as “dangerous supplement to the ‘impossibility of sexual relationship’ (*Seminar*) so much so that violence becomes the substitute for a lack, where the other finds it difficult to absorb the uncanniness of such an act. While this might precisely happen because such a desire lacks the feminine perspective, it might lead to a “transgressive forging” that happens through the repetition and reiteration of violence where violence would stand “for the impossible transcendence of impossibility” (Dhar *Seminar*). In other words, the impossibility of a sexual relationship unleashes the desire to forge the impossible through a series of repetitive and reiterative violence which looks forward to the transcendence of pain or pleasure involved in sexual desires by trying to comprehend that numbness of impossibility.

Dhar further argues that while there is an unconscious desire at the core of violence, there is also the question of the perpetrator’s secret pleasures in the act of violence. This brings Dhar to the other side of secret pleasure of violence- the subtle

pleasure of violence, “the violative nature of sex even if subtle” (*Seminar*). In this regard Dhar evokes Andrea Dworkin who could see a link between violence and sex which later translated into the link between pornographic sex and subtle violence. As porn in its goriest form flows free into the market which feeds on it, Dworkin suggested, that the “new ethic of sexual narcissism is alive and kicking”(qtd. in Dhar, *Seminar*). In such a pornographic imagination the male desire is dehumanised; the female body is fetishized, hyper-sexualised and consequently, dehumanised. This fetishised woman body, fair in Dworkin’s imagination, becomes the standard of womanhood as it creates the standard imagination of compliance, submission, oppression which goes on to create a sexualisation of insult, humiliation and cruelty. It reduces the female body into nothing, but before being reduced to nothing it makes its other, something great. The purpose of this sexual violence is to hurt; but that hurt emanates from a consciousness that it is only an extension of the ordinary hurt of everyday, which humiliates women, insults their bodies and is inevitable. It might, therefore, be said that it is in the desire of the impossible that channelizes itself towards the violent.

Detective fictions meditation on the various forms of violence inevitably brings it to the threshold of such acts of violence which are unable to bring up precise reasons for its occurrence. *TSOI* revolves around a gruesome sex trading and drug racket which operates out of Goa under the supervision of Vinay Gupta, who is the candidate for being the Home Minister of the state. This gang lures young girls, mostly coming from outside the region, into the trade by, firstly, offering a luxurious life to these middle class girls, and then captivating them to a point of no return. Lisa Kay is a young British girl who is also lured into the business with the agenda of being used for profit. She is offered a luxurious life until it turns her wild, takes her beyond limits so much so that she no longer remains of any good use. It is, then, that her use is staged in the form of violent sexual rape where her presence is legitimised as a female body being put to use by scions of power. After suffering a brutal gang rape when the girl was hurled down into the beach, she is again picked up by Vinay Gupta’s bodyguards who rape her compulsively, openly and without any grit. Vishnu’s video of that rape reveals how the atrocity had been going on even after the high dosages of cocaine had made her body unresistant and also after she had died in the course of the assault. This assault was directed to her body since as a victim of alcohol and drug abuse she could not be put to

any good use, an idea of violence that only evokes horror, but also may be regarded as violence of pleasure which was evoked out of the forging of an impossible sexual relationship.

In *TSG*, Swaminathan presents the character of Varsha who emerges as the mastermind of a complex circle of desire and violence which lashes so powerfully against those who find themselves in her life that they all end up dead, either killed by Varsha herself, or by committing suicide. Varsha murders her own parents for apparently no reason, buries them in her garden which she takes great care of, pretends that they died in a bus accident which coincides with their disappearance, and also takes her lover, who is an electrician of low caste and class, as complicit in the act. She uses the power of her class, her beauty as a bait to lure Sukesh into being an accomplice in the horrific murder of her parents. She terrorizes her husband Anil by her atrocious and cruel behaviour. Later on she carefully plans the murder of Rita, Anil's lover, buries Rita in her garden, buys the silence of Mr. Kolse, the eye witness of the murder, by making out with him, and also plants alibis for Anil's murder to appear as a suicide. She coincidentally dies in a plane crash. Lalli concludes: "Varsha was more than a confident murderer, she was a compulsive one" (Swaminathan, *TSG*, 239) which points to the fact that for some violence is just an act of fun, a pleasure that is in itself the cause of violence.

One can find a compulsive murderer in Sitara in *MM* who drives herself into all kinds of work- theft, fraud, prostitution- in order to keep gauging which way the "stirrings within us [which] have their fearful excesses" might take one down the course (Swaminathan, *MM*, 239). She commits a series of murders in order to keep breaking the limits of her fear, in order to keep extending her boundaries. In the course she commits murders, tries to plant evidences against her husband Vinay whom she tortures psychologically, tries to kill Ramona, proving herself as someone for whom the violence of murder is just another funny experiment meant to help her prove that nothing can ultimately stop her from such acts of violence which exist for their own sake (ibid: 243).

In the character of Bimalchandra Patnaik, Swaminathan depicts an obsessive killer who rapes and murders his own six year old daughter as a 'sacrifice' in his process to "rise beyond good or evil" (Swaminathan, *GL*, 165), a statement that seems

meditative; it is a meditation in violence. His sacrifice is the way to overcome pain, pain which evolves out of the violence incurred and also the violence one suffers by the infliction of pain. While that is the 'bad' that he wants to rise above, the 'good' is interred in the pleasure of afflicting violence and achieving the objectives. It is supposed to be cathartic and also requires continuous practice. So in his urge to perfect his salvation, he continues raping and murdering innocent girls because they alone epitomise 'purity' (ibid: 166), violence against whom is unreasonable and unimaginable. Hence he considers his ventures into violence as "handiwork" (ibid: 169) and goes on a spree because "there were so many, but never enough" (ibid: 166). He is unscrupulous about his crime against humanity, unscrupulous about indulging a differently abled boy like Daya into his crime, unscrupulous about tutoring young boys to becoming criminals. He is in the lookout for heroic splendour, saintly halo, but the suicide of his son, Subhendu, after he divulged his exercise to him, leaves him listless. "...the sacrifice [after the suicide] was ineffectual", he says, and feels that he has transcended to a higher level where pain or pleasure does not affect him anymore (ibid: 167). It is, then, that he finds his disciples among the rich boys of L'Allegra where a different game of violence is played out.

These boys, rich, educated, powerful, easily othered anything that was outside themselves. For them the violence which they are being tutored into is a game that they are used to playing on their computer screens. Rajiv mentions in his confession, "I was not aware that we had caused actual harm. I never thought those kids were real" which does not only smack of mindless power but also of mindless inhumanity (Swaminathan, *GL*, 179). Not only are the kids, the little girls, they brought from Kandiwadi slums, not 'real' for them because in their class consciousness they were nothing more than gnats, these kids are not 'real' because they were using them as a tool to prove their point that they too could rise above good or evil like their 'guru'. Their brutal infliction of violence was taped, pictured by themselves which allowed Rajiv to make money- "the snuff film I made of the kid's last moments was amazing. The gore sites just lapped it up" once again proving Lalli's statement- violence was pornography- imbricated within patriarchal ideologies where the body of the 'weak' as a site of violence excites pleasure through the idea of finding pleasure in the impossible, unimaginable (ibid: 179). The 'real' here are only the pictures, the videos which turned the kids into objects alone- to be viewed, enjoyed and forgotten, much like what the

sensation mongering news or even discussions do, steering the gaze from the things that actually mattered. They try to attach reason to their violent act. Varun wants to help his father get the construction project built at Kandiwadi slum; hence the dead bodies of these children would scare the dwellers to leave the place. But in their hearts of hearts they know there was no reason which could justify their acts of brutality. Their 'fun' ceases to be exciting after sometime, and they grow 'depressed' over the act. However their culpability does not leave them. But that was another story- the story of power, which often entwines itself with a tale of violence. They do not clean up the flats in which they carry out their crimes- all marks of torture blaring at the viewer from every part of the flat. Lalli reasons out such an act of violence as being, "... a crime of arrogance. They don't *need* to clean up, they are above the law, completely unaccountable. And as for disgust- they don't feel any. They have reached a paranoid plane of power" (Swaminathan, *GL*,144). This 'impossible transcendence of impossibility' (Dhar *Seminar*) certainly makes certain acts of violence beyond good or evil, and also beyond punishment.

In this overwhelming scenario of violence that seems to pervade everyday lives, that seems inescapable, that continuously threatens loss of potentialities, stunts growth, how do the women detectives negotiate with an impossible scenario? While violence seeps into the very being, frustrates the expectation of becoming, how does the experience of violence upon themselves, upon others influence their subjectivities? More so, how do they work out detective fictions' agenda of a just world?

### 5.8. **Just world order: a utopia then?**

While violence has been an integral part of different genres of fiction, in the world of detective fiction violence becomes the fulcrum around which the entire narrative structure revolves. It is by exploring the various ramifications of crime and violence that detective fiction attempts to attract the interest of readers, risking voyeurism at times. These fictions tend to open up an understanding of the possibilities and realities of disorderliness in order to disrupt the sense of complacency in seeming orderliness that one readily indulges into. But had detective fiction left that disruption unaddressed, it might not have been able to garner that popularity it has always enjoyed because the popularity of detective fiction also lies in its ability to suggest various methods of controlling crime. The suggestion of these methods, according to Knight,

not only create(s) an idea (or hope, or a dream) about controlling crime, but both realise and validate a whole view of the world, one shared by the people who become the central audience to buy, read and find comfort in a particular variety of crime fiction (*Ideology 2*).

It is to facilitate the idea of this hope that the genre has been energetically involved in the process of suggesting methods of controlling crime, the variations in which may hint at the fissures innate within this very idea of hope that crime fiction sets out to consolidate. Whether it is the dependence on an individual detective or police procedurals, the genre has always tried to assert a moral at the end, a sort of retribution, which also becomes the larger symbol for people to understand what crime and violence might be, and what constitutes the lawful and the unlawful. All this eventually leads up to asserting that the lessons, thus, received could be used in a prescriptive sense for becoming aware citizens. Again, it has always been suggested that the genre is for indulging in pleasure reading- could be read by daily commuters on their way to work, by homemakers during their time to relax, or by travellers during long voyages. The confluence of violence, retribution, morality and prescription makes the genre quite coveted among readers, then. But another problem emerges when it is to be understood how the readers would see this world of violence then - as extrinsic to the world they lived in, an aberration, or an intrinsic part of human life? It is on the basis of this placement that one could conjure an understanding of hope that these narratives set out to create.

To analyse what goes into the making of this world of hope, one might take up the analysis of two most important aspect of detective fiction- the detective and the fiction, i.e. the narrative and the individual. Knight talks of 'strain ideology'- 'an optimistic account of selecting and ordering material to provide a consoling fable in the face of disturbing reality' (*Ideology 13*) which is used to conjure up the worlds in these fictions. Going by the same logic Knight also visualises the genre making way for creating disturbing silences in the text which are influenced by ideological forces (*Ideology 34*). For instance, in the Krishna stories the narrative of the texts uses stock descriptions of criminals that the audience could easily identify with, and contains value-induced phrases which impose such value-understandings on the readers, deals with generalised world views instead of opening up to the intricacies of crime and retribution. Violence has a conventional sense; the silences are mostly directed to the



kind of violence which can be contained, like the violence directed by Rajendra Prasad towards his wife and child which emanates from his need to distract Krishna and the police by conjuring an environment of false sympathy, but eventually leads to the death of his infant (*KA*). However, a belief in the inherent goodness of society cannot be altogether done away with either, or else the very idea of society would be without perspective. Again, there are moments when even such selection and ordering might lead to the surfacing of the underlying tensions, fissures within the ideological apparatus that informs the text. Those fissures and raptures are identified as operative through the coordinates of class, caste, gender, sexuality, religion and such coordinates, thereby, conferring the text with no singular pattern of progress in the narrative. These overlapping patterns have always demanded for new models of tackling crime, newer understandings of violence which might also go on to prove that there has been no linear progression in the way the idea of crime, violence, hope for a just world play themselves within narrative strategies of the genre.

It is, then, that pressure is incurred upon individual rationalism which, on one hand, tends to destabilise the idea of an organic society, or the idea of evil as inherent to the criminal, while, on the other, visualises the society's urge to proceed towards a subjective dream of order, a hope that might actually be unavailable. This puts the detective in a trying situation where scrutinising crime and violence from every possible perspective, and with a more or less objective lens, she must create a world view that might be able to console the anxiety caused by crime. It is, then, that a reworking of the world view becomes necessary allowing it to emerge anew and most powerfully.

It is from this urge of a renewed world view that one might be able to notice different ramifications in the idea of the detective. There is the idea of the intelligent, infallible, isolated enquirer, whose 'withdrawn intellectualism and skills', meditated upon and sharpened in privacy, are applied to an available world (Knight, *Ideology*, 41). This intellectual detective, who provides intellectual solution to everyday realities attests to Knight's inference that the isolated position of the artist in the bourgeois market economy, working under the constraints of numerous lacks and delays, and even within the lack of an independence of authority, could allow one to invest faith in intellectualism as a mode of conscious human control of the threatening world (*ibid*:

43). It is believed that a lonely mind could alone dominate on the alarms of an environment picking up its bits and pieces to form a holistic frame that could in turn sort the disorder. A classic example of such a detective could be Poe's Monsieur Dupin.

However, this necessitates that the realistic materials are kept at a distance, so that the fable of illusion created by the detective world could take over. When such intellectualism and isolation leaves the idea of containing violence ambivalent when attached to reality, the idea of the detective branches out to incorporate a rational individual, who combines scientific knowledge with societal and cultural knowledge, and intellectualism to provide the ultimate resolution for the anxieties of the middle class. Logical reasoning becomes the measure of detective skill so much so that the detective propagates the idea of naturalised 'rational individualism', (Knight, *Ideology*, 68). Retrospective pattern of analysing crime is used, which often brings about an idea of justification of the violence as an outcome of past immorality. As the question of ethics gets incorporated into the narrative framework, the detective, though portrayed as an unbiased observer, finds herself entangled by realisation of aberrance, which cannot be completely sorted, because the notion that disorder and violence has been internalised as an integral part of society always lurks as an inevitable truth. Violence continues to emerge as unresolvable; the events might find closure, not the effects or the acts. Lalli is often seen disturbed by the resurgence of violence which she had thought has died down. In *GL*, when the patterns of murdering the little girls point at serial abuse, she remembers the Sambhalpur murders which also had a similar pattern where the case was considered resolved and the files closed. She blurts anxiously, "Yes, yes! I thought I would never have to again. Once in a lifetime was more than I could bear" (Swaminathan, *GL*, 19). Violence appears as moving through an eventful chain which points at the micro practices of violence within the everyday scope of life.

As detective fictions become imbricated in everyday experiences, the idea of the dynamic detective who must move around also becomes important as it is through her presence in different locales that the detective is supposed to look for the unfamiliar in the familiar. This skill is used to design the detective's ability to unpacking little, common place things to recognise the extraordinary in them which would in turn help to understand violence from peace, if such a comprehension is at all possible. Lalli

finds out that Deepika's soiled doll, which had been cut at the arm to make a treasure trove, was full of small things that could make a little girl curious, realising that she was being lured with small presents, inevitably a trap which led to her murder (*GL*). Thus, commonplace, yet the extraordinary hero, who possesses immense knowledge about ordinary lives of people, could unveil the strangeness which can characterise the most familiar events, places, practices and people. Being an aura of spontaneity, of resourceful vigour that allows her to maintain a hero's authority, she appears as her own provider. Thus an amalgamation of all desired traits- bourgeois individualism, scientific knowledge, the urge to contribute to the well-being of the evolving societies, allows the detective to develop a comprehension of the world as she manages to lessen her distance with the world, while also trailing clouds of powerful cerebration and withdrawn intellectual force.

While the detective situates herself in the enlarging cityscapes, she becomes familiar with disturbing events that mark the dangers which are present in the familiar urban spaces. When her demeanour changes from being the disciplined detective to the fussy, messy, unheroic detective, especially a woman, the male narcissism of being able to control the world of aberration is completely overturned. This male narcissism made the detective as someone who had once been adorned as the protector of the masses, as someone who, although distanced and objective, could be the provider, a common being made superior by tools of abstract intellectualism, material rationality and thus, celebrated for his individualistic heroics, which created an aura of exceptionalism (Knight, *Ideology*, 75). The creations, now, are propelled by a disinterest in contributing to such a narcissistic venture, and emerge as someone who is either not integrated into the social structure, or is part of it, but with a difference, as might be expected from a modern subjective position of a woman detective. As such the woman detective finds herself open for experimentation with the methods of being a detective, with the modes of detection and also with the outcome of the entire venture.

The rising experiences of the women's worlds, and the fact that detective stories had now moved into the *andarmahals* allow the novels to structure themselves around the method of the domestication as the detective method. The idea of close reading, which was not altogether absent in the previous narratives, however becomes important

for understanding the method of the woman detective who draws logic and reasoning from her everyday experiences, from the nitty-gritties of the domestic sphere. Again, this ordering of facts is also based on something from within- instincts- which leads to what may be discerned as a feminisation of the method of detection where the internal cerebration of women is given an important space, thus undoing the intense domination of rationality and logical method endorsed by earlier detectives. This leads to humanising of the process of detection while complexity pertaining to understanding the contours of crime and disorder is also extended to incorporating unsolvable elements into it, especially, in terms of the impossibility of visualising and understanding violence. The notion of crime makes it sort of an inward looking exercise where the threat of violence could ruffle up the very idea of organic unity within the family. Anyone could be driven towards crime; disorder, like detection, could be done from within. Crime could be as simple as an everyday activity and might have nothing to do with an enemy from outside, but with an enemy from within. What could be explored by rating crime is the value that can be attached to it by the sense or state of morality and the hurt that it evokes.

In fact this dependence on domesticated epistemology of comprehending crime to arrive at a solution, or to realise that solution might be unavailable and hence to adjust, or live on with precarity is a self-consciously female stance that is taken based on the experiences of a woman detective, who projects an amalgamation of rationality and emotionality, straddles between alienation and accessibility. This dichotomous stands makes the woman detective more reliable, and also makes her more observant of how and where the invisible strands of violence plays its havoc, while she too becomes its inadvertent victim in the process of detection, whether literally or metaphorically. As an individual she becomes volatile, given to emotions (like Simran), prone to falling into trouble (Krishna is always captured by the villain, but emerges safely from being the captive), distraught (Lalli often retires into complete silence when she is unable to make reasons of events, especially violence). Individual heroism is, also, expanded to incorporate the idea of laying down clues that could order themselves in creating logical solutions not only by the detective, but also, and most importantly, by the readers. The following of this pattern allows rejection of the idea that special powers is possessed by the detective, and enlivens the frame by exerting upon the familial power

of observation and interpretation which could be possible through peaceful reflection and the zeal and power to look beyond the given.

The need of a hero to save people is rejected to accommodate the notion that everyone is in control of themselves. This thoroughly overturns the patriarchal ideology of victimhood which is often embedded within discourses of honour, shame, chastity or silencing of the subject of violence. What this brings up is an understanding that precarity brings with it a scope for healing. This healing cannot be adjudged as positivist, a process of righting the wrong, but as a resistance against the violence of closure. While violence tends to create a world of fear where possibilities are stunted and silenced, a counter discourse of violence seems to inverse this atmosphere of fear by creating scope for possibilities through the resistance of fear. The women detectives venture into the vortex of crime and violence to dismantle this idea of fear- a sort of resistance that they put up against violence itself. With a heightened awareness of violence they are able to inspire an empathetic understanding of such painful experiences which form a common pool of experiences for women. Interestingly, we can find the women detectives are being able to narrate the pain. It is by this narration of the pain that they seem to politicise the pain by making it visible. Their resolutions are immediate, not subscribing to any preconceived notion of a just world, neither looking forward to the stability of it. It is so because they realise that the greyness of violence where violence of everyday life cannot be separated from violence in the larger context requires solutions which can transcend the understanding of violence itself. Hence, they tend to open up possibilities of happiness, of risk taking, of empowerment by using the effects of violence politically. Hence Simran negotiates a deal with the corrupt police officers so that Durga, an accused of thirteen murders, can be released; Krishna helps Raja Rao to flee the clutches of the authorities; Mitin takes Bumbum to Rustamji's house to play with the traumatised Rony so that he may be able to forget his fear and come back to life; Lallibrings in the women and children of the slum to confront the monstrous Bimalchandra Patnaik with their defying gaze which neither projected fear nor deference for the culprit, nor aggression or hate. Peace and violence are two sides of the same coin; both may foster aggression; what heals is empathy, a bonding of hurt where hurt is political.

The last scene in *GL* is extremely telling. When Lalli is convinced after a week long silence that such violence cannot be over, she is taken to out Kandewadi in the morning by Sita. Kandewadi is seen to be at its usual business with factories as noisy as ever, traffic thick in the streets, A-1 general store crowded as ever, until all paused: “Children dressed for school oozed out of the pores of Kandewadi” (Swaminathan, *GL*, 3); “...children...bright as morning, solemn as night” (ibid: 196) as everyone stood worshipping this deluge striding towards a progressive future. The idea of just world evolves as fractured as resolution to problems no longer means an end. Violence evolves as a continuum and the idea of an organic whole is left ruptured and open for suspicion and unresolvable doubts. However, hope of order within disorder is something that allows the hope for stability to prevail, as a deferred reality of attainment, to be lived in contingent moments of emancipation. Confronting cruelty is always painful, but cynicism cannot be a solution. The women detectives, therefore, emerge as ones who recourse towards hope to be able to build an empathetic world order which might not be able to contain its fissures but might be able to build bridges across it, bridges that connect, that allows a go-over.

## NOTES

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## Chapter – 6

### **Conclusion: Gendering the Genre where the Gender is Woman**

A conclusion demands the bringing together of strands and tying the final knot. But the question is- can there be a final, an end? May be not, or maybe it's just a way to begin. Hence 'conclusions' also lay down the way ahead- the way that leads towards further explorations, further untying and unknotting- a beginning anew!

#### **6.1. Looking Back: Summarising the Chapters**

The research begins by exploring the reasons for the dearth of academic engagements with a genre as multifarious as detective fictions in India. This dearth becomes more conspicuous when one notices that crime in literature and crime fictions are in no way a novelty in Indian literatures, both in oral and written traditions. Yet when crime fiction or the canon of detective fictions is to be considered, a preconceived idea seems to be afloat that it is an imported genre drawn in the traditions of mainly British and American genres, where the Indian input can only be considered as a branching out, but never a canon in itself. Moreover, it is duly surprising that when academic research has left very few areas untouched, the prolific genre of detective fiction, which has registered both a local and a global appeal in terms of consumption, might be shoved aside with academic disregard. The reasons for such apathy seems to be located within the ideological distinction between the literary and commercial genre, in the dynamics involved in the processes of production and dissemination of works, and also in the very idea of what South Asian literatures could comprise of. The very exploration into the idea of genre brings up the notion of genre fiction which has been comprehended as a 'collection of motifs' (Chattopadhyay et.al. 2)<sup>i</sup> that easily dislodges distinctness of genres by comingling genres to produce an effect which is far more engaging, and often becomes identified as 'popular' genres because of their mass appeal. While this unidentifiable mass appeal tends to demean the potential of the genre in constricted academic circles, this appeal should become the very reason why the genre can be studied to understand how the ideas depicted in it might in turn produce a critique of social, moral and cultural values, thus making the genre intensely political. Moreover, being a popular genre means the genre is intensely impacted by the production and distribution circles which often tend to dictate terms based on market



value. While such terms may be associated with literary genres as well, it becomes significant to note that the terms keep changing according to market demand. This opens up a wide field of exploration where the genre can always topple its own conventions and emerge anew. Further the disinterest in the genre of Indian detective fictions also opens itself up to an exploration into the understanding the idea of South Asian literature as a category which seems constricted within certain understandings of what South Asian literature should be. While the very idea of South Asia dismantles the idea of borders, generic borders seem to be at its place, often creating a disregard for something that would not be endorsed by the west as South Asian, given the contribution of the west in creating the category of 'South Asia'. However, an analysis of Indian detective fictions inevitably brings out the fact that detective fiction has been continuously disregarding boundaries by its intermingling of genres, disciplines, ideas and also in its way to create a counter discourse to ideas related to nation, family, work, violence and such categories which make modern nation state recognizable. Such a premise is set to open up exploration into the genre of Indian women's detective fictions involving women detectives who seem to problematize the masculine verisimilitude of the genre while also becoming significant in commenting on the very idea of Indian women subjectivities.

The investigation, therefore, first fathoms into the conventions of the genre by trying to exploring the reasons behind the huge attention the genre of detective fictions garnered at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century when it flooded the regional markets with translations of the popular British, American and French detective fictions. These translations prompted the introduction of local detective characters that were molded to suit an Indian audience which was reeling under the pressures of a colonial government, and the rising nationalist movement. Detective fictions, thereby, catered to the sensibilities of nationalist feelings in a readership which was looking for both a vent and a source of inspiration to instigate themselves for the cause of the nation. Focusing on Bengali detective fictions, which is considered as the forerunner of the Indian canon of detective fictions (Orsini 35), it is found that detective fictions- from *daroga* stories to *goyenda* stories- aptly carry forward the nationalist agenda appealing to the *bhadralok* sensibility in all its ways. From characterization to language to plot construction- all are tailored to influence *bhadralok* patronage. It is here that the question of the influence of English detective

fictions seems to reveal itself as a matter of ideological selection where the impactful and popular women detective stories are not translated into Indian languages, except for the seemingly compatible Miss Marple stories. However, the very entanglement with the *andarmahalas* the location of crime and violence inevitably makes the genre look into ‘woman’s question’, which is where the problematic within the genre emerges. The genre has to deal with violence, the murky secrets of the *andarmahal* which had already been brought to the fore by domestic fictions of Bankim, Tagore and others. It also has to cater to a largely sensation mongering readership, present even in the guise of the high morality of the *bhadralok*. As such the genre opens itself up to exploring the issue of gender and crime, of course, through constrictions inspired by the contemporary socio-cultural and political ambience. Inspired by the ongoing debates concerning the women’s question, the genre clearly sides with the nationalists in precipitating a constricted image of women, which not only makes the genre compulsively male, but also creates several problems in extending the imagination to a woman detective. While the earlier versions of the genre, focusing on the male detective, looks at a woman either as a victim or a villain, often raising a critique of the emerging ‘*nabyanari*’, the ‘new woman’, the woman detective finds her way into the genre only as curious *pishima*<sup>ii</sup> or *thakuma*<sup>iii</sup>, elderly women, desexed, and living in the rural areas with a small range of known people to work within. When the ‘new woman’ is incorporated as a favourable character in male detective fictions after 1920s, she is relegated to domestic chores, after her initial spark of brilliance inspires the attraction of the new middle class man, the *bhadralok* detective.

In the changing milieu of the Indian political and literary scene which witnessed the phenomenal rise of the woman writer, the woman detective did emerge in Prabhavati Debi Saraswati’s Krishna series, the first story of which was published in around 1940s-50s by Deb Sahitya Kutir in Calcutta. However, that rise was not an easy one since the woman detective had to combat with the constricted *bhadralok* ideologies to make herself convincing as a detective. In order to find out how such an intervention, or incorporation became at all plausible, the investigation delves into the contemporary literary and political scenario to understanding how women were negotiating with the changes brought about by education, the rising aspirations of the nation state, the influence of colonial modernity. It could be found that while women had been the most mechanized tool for the percolation of patriarchies, women were also equally

convinced about their need to be vocal against patriarchies. Hence women's voices could be heard through active political participation, through the institution of women's organisations, through women's literary activities besides their everyday resistances against subordination and oppression within the confines of homes. As writing became a major tool in the hands of women, it allowed them to come out of their confines, to reason out their positions, to challenge oppressive regimes while also trying to negotiate with the 'new' and the 'change' that their lives were undergoing in the rapidly changing social and political circumstances. As changes are always continuous, women always find themselves in the process of being which attaches them invariably to the social, cultural and political backdrop against which the ramifications of these negotiations can be understood. Hence there arises a need to analyse these negotiations by women through the lens of the political upheavals which instigated women's movements both in the pre-Independence and the post-Independence era. The women's movements have been capable to instill and popularize women's cause and gender issues within the societal and political structures, although not quite successful in bringing about a radical change in these functions. As this makes it important to analyse the category of woman not as pre-conceived and fixed, it also becomes important to contextualizing women as a historical and political subject in order to avoid reductive generalisation.

This creates ample grounds for looking into the issues of women's movements, emerging through women's writings, feminist literary criticism, the emergence of women's studies discipline, which have been instrumental in putting forth a feminist perspective of the social, political and the cultural. The rise of the idea of middle class Indian woman, the *bhadramohila*, with the rise of the nation state allows exploration into the representation of such women in literatures which display evidence of being under the influence of such movements where representations can be seen as constantly combating expectations and realities. Indian women's detective fictions featuring women detectives exemplify experimentation with the boundaries that women are constricted within, but are meant to topple in order to allow nuance into the middle class Indian women subjectivities, which cannot be a monolithic construct. The analysis as such tries to understand the middle class women subjectivities emerging from multiple points of entry- from the first Bengali woman detective in Prabhabati Debi Saraswati's *Krishna* to the twentieth century women detectives as Suchitra

Bhattacharya's *Mitin maashi*, Kishwar Desai's *Simran Singh*, Madhumita Bhattacharya's *Reema Ray* and Kalpana Swaminathan's *Lalli*. The imagination of these women detectives can be found thoroughly imbricated into the ideas of nation, family, work and violence which are definitely considered gendered spaces of negotiation and existence.

As women's movements demanded the constant circulation of ideas of resistance, reformulations, women writers have imbibed from these movements the necessity to recognize and articulate their own dilemmas which has in turn also voiced the dilemmas of many others. Women's writings, being a voice from the margins, have also been conscious of the privileges of articulation through writing which is not available to all. As such, feminist criticisms in collusion with women's writings have also tried to create avenues for articulation of suppressed voices, thus trying to create writing as a platform which could vociferously give expression to women's concerns. In the scene of avid writing by women writers, besides other avenues that women aptly adopted to give expressions to their concerns, the genre of novel writing emerges as a potent vehicle of articulation for women writers and as a repository of ideas for the women readers. The story of women writing novels in India is a tale of how women's novels have always been the vehicles by which women's evolving subjectivities and self-representations have constantly found expression in an effort to document the changing, or not-so-changing, experiences in the lives of women.

Needless to say, writing from within social, cultural and physical confines, the dispensation of gender awareness is not possible for a majority of women writers in Indian contexts. The crossing over, for the women who moved out of the confines, either physically or creatively, also gives them wings of imagination through which they present the vision of a world of gender equality predicated upon education, employment, and legal rights. Focussed on directing attention towards social change, women writers continuously write out of an intense urge to express an experiential reality, even while they continue to experiment with the stylistics of novel writing. It becomes important to comprehend the peculiar tensions between public and private realities which underlies women's writing because for a woman writer to live in the times she does and the situations that she has to negotiate with, always render her doubly othered- as a woman and as a political subject- even in her own vision (Tharu

and Lalita 58). As such women's writings project a veritable critique of the gendered bias of all such institutions that affect women the most- the institution of family, which is considered as their natural domain, the institution of nation negotiating with whose standards of recognition allows them to emerge as political subjects, and also the institution of the public domain of work which continuously makes them interrogate the distinctions conferred to the understandings of public and private in women's lives. Indian women's detective fictions open up avenues for analysing these aspects which intersect to affect women's lives, especially the middle class urban women's lives, in this case. Thus the negotiations of women detectives with the gendered structures of nation, family and work reveal their urge to refurbish the conventions that inform these ideas. As the women detectives find themselves continuously interrogating these structures that inevitably shape women's bordered experience, they find themselves standing at the threshold of renegotiations where they must transcend these bordered existence and foster solidarities through empathetic identification.

The analysis further probes into the complicated idea of violence that has been the focal point of both women's movements in India as well as the genre of detective fiction. The complicated idea of what constitutes as violence leads to an understanding where violence is mostly visible as a state of exception, which tries to influence the idea of justice by identifying a perpetrator, thus the source of violence, which can eventually be neutralized, restoring peace. This idea of peace, however, seems to get ruffled up when peace can no longer be separated from violence, when the discourses of peace stimulate silencing of narratives opposing its consolidation. It is the identification of these narratives which can lead one to analyse how the violence within ordinary everyday lives, which do not produce a state of exception, become subsumed into the monotony of everyday life. The regularity of such forms of violence, which may be considered as symbolic or systemic forms of violence, tends to make the comprehension of violence obscure. What such forms of violence further engender is an atmosphere of fear and negativity that stunts growth and possibility, understood as the violence of closure. However, it is in the recognition of avenues of opening up such possibilities that violence can become transformative, can generate understandings of freedom. Women's detective fictions are not only able to gauge the play of violence within ordinary everyday lives, they also tend to provide an avenue by which violence can be empowering. They create avenues by which pain or the state of hurt can be

politicized to allow it to forge relationships through a common pool of experience of pain. While this might not allow them to suture the gaps that are created in the world, it definitely makes them think of the world order differently. Such an analysis not only opens up the fissures that might lay inherent within the genre's commitment towards creating a just world, it also speaks volumes of how such experiences shape the very subjectivity of the women detective.

## 6.2. Tying the Knots: The Evolving Women Subjectivities

The act of writing entails a complex dovetailing of ideas which are evoked by affinities and affiliations that a writer subscribes to and accumulates as she encounters myriad experiences through a composite of life. Whether conscious or unconscious of it, the very act of writing is a political act, especially in case of women, whose advent into the world of letters has never been smooth. It seems quite significant here to evoke Gopal<sup>iv</sup>'s categorical warning that when it comes to the act of writing and when that act of writing is by women, it must be borne in mind that what we are dealing with is only a proportionately small portion of what is going on in the cultural terrains of production which is also dependent on transmission at large (288). Not only does it make one conscious of the limitations incurred by social status, politics of access, forms of expressions, it also makes one realise that women's writings, therefore, must be intensely imbricated within the politics which serves as the foundation of the very act of writing. Hence while being aware of the social and cultural limitations of the act, the act might also serve to lay bare the inherent sparks of revolutionary sensibilities which the act encases within itself.

Women's writings is discerned as "...documents which might display what is at stake in the embattled practices of self and agency, and in the making of a habitable world, at the margins of patriarchies..." (Tharu & Lalitha 39)<sup>v</sup>. Hence, the analysis of women's writing has been an industry which has tried to look into, 'retrieve', re-assess this act of writing as a means to understanding how and when women found a 'voice'. When subversive to status quo, women's literary initiatives may, as such, be seen against the restructuring of patriarchy and gender. It is also seen as facilitating and influencing major "reorientation of social imaginary" (ibid: 42) which opens up avenues to understand the character of women's resistances within the narrative framework. As such women's writing in India can be reckoned as documents of women

who “dreamt of overcoming socially sanctioned, institutionalised suppression and oppression, and of leading a normal human life within a radically reconstituted society in which they would no longer be ‘the second sex’” (Kosambi<sup>vi</sup> 1). Kosambi points out that for women art was an expression of their lived experience in its manifold aspects (3), thus mostly having an iota of reality in it. Narratives of various kinds are among the principal tools with which women sculpted the new social imaginary, while the more factual forms of art- documentary films, news magazines, history itself- have also played important roles in women’s effort to retell and renegotiate with her life world. Writing from an intense sense of self-expression, women writers have constantly deployed fiction as a conduit for social change. Written from the confines of home, women’s creative fictions have always had a definitive gender issue and have been used to rally for gender equality premised upon the concerns for education, employment, and legal rights. As long as this experiential world was limited to family and the domestic realms, home remained their concern. As they started moving out into the public sphere and the scope of their experiences broadened, the complexities of gendered existence, therein, were also reflected in their writings. In fact women could hardly afford the luxury of dispensing with gender awareness since, apart from those with ‘privileges of power’, the disabilities brought about by the dominating category of gender is ubiquitous. However, cutting across class, caste, religion, ethnicities and other such coordinates women’s concern with social and cultural disabilities have been intense.

One of the major resistances that women have faced is while trying to occupy the male dominated literary canons which have always hegemonized the idea of being universal. These had, what Kosambi calls, ‘epistemic privilege’ (5) so that the visibility accorded to women within such dominant ambience has been in the form of essentialist representation, or subscription to the *modus operandi* of the established framework. The thinking, feeling, and articulating women authors have always been subjected to suspicion, censure, disbelief and even, erasure. Male novelist appropriated the right to ‘write gender’ for the benefit of male readers and the edification of female readers (Kosambi 5). To break through such hegemonies has been a matter of continuous renegotiation and retelling of the dominant ideas of nation, and its intricate connection with the other institutions that are traditionally attached to women- marriage, family, domesticity- and now with the new avenues in the public sphere of work opening up for

women- the private and public divide. Women's writings can always be expected to rewrite the cultural and social geography of the country. Their worlds are that which engage with the multiple, cross cutting determination of their historical realities. Dwelling on the intricacies of female experiences, women's writings have been able to represent the varied forms of subjugation, oppression, exploitation, emancipation, without filtering out the politics that informs these experiences through everyday negotiations with patriarchies.

As the country is being recreated through a multifaceted, contradictory, oppositional consciousness with little or no effort being extended towards the stitching gaps of caste, class, rural, urban and even gender, it becomes imperative that differences are studied and understood with greater consciousness. The precarity that emerges out of gender, lopsided understanding of feminism that continues to be urban, middle class, intellectual, while the margins remain under-represented, makes it essential that women go beyond being a mere suggestion of a presence. It becomes essential that woman evolve as a 'new subject' who is made by a self-referential consciousness that allows her to include the other into herself, create communities bound by the relationship of the margins, bound by being outside the dominant discourses of the mainstream, bound by a state of hurt, by the ability of resurrection. Women's literature seems to have ventured into creating an understanding of this kind of relationship by redefining the conventional notions of nation, by trying to comprehend renegotiation with the ideas of family, work and also violence so that they could comprehend 'change' and 'new' in the urban, middle class women subjectivities as can be seen in the terrain of Indian women's detective fictions featuring the women detectives.

### **6.2.1. Women writers, women detectives**

The genre of detective fiction has been ubiquitously recognised as being gendered and patriarchal, since its very structure smacks of masculinity, making the male figure of the detective the only possibility. Here the incorporation of gender other than male are either dismissed as mere digression, or are approved as long as they subscribe to the ideological parameters that make the genre. However, as women writers made their ways to work on the contested terrains of the genre, conscious of the resistances they would have to confront given the monolithic structure of the genre, and



the male centric understanding of crime, detection, justice, violence, it became necessary to refurbish a coterie of ideas that made the genre, thus making way for a parallel development based on female experiences. Not only did the venturing of the women writers into the genre, therefore, complicate the ideas of detection by bringing in a composite of social, cultural, political and domestic comprehension of experiences, it also overhauled the idea of the detective from being a recluse to being a social subject whose investment in the act of detection was considerably influenced by her interaction with the ideas of nation, family, work, and violence. While this sought to overturn the masculine verisimilitude that the genre projected, it also challenged the stereotypical representation of women in the genre as either a victim or a vamp. The process of re-evaluating the genre conventions by the women writers was, thus, accomplished by using the dominant, prevalent genre conventions to turn them on their heads in order to create a world which relied less on creating an illusion of hope by sidestepping realities, and more on trying to find ways of consoling the anxieties that emerge from the various experiences in women's lives, especially the experiences of the gendered space created by the coming together of the coordinates of categories like nation, family, work, and violence.

The women detectives' negotiations with these categories, as seen in the critical evaluation of the select works in the research, have been symptomatic of a woman's complicated positioning therein. It is clear that while being intricately linked to the idea of Indian women, these categories do not convey any homogenous understanding of Indian womanhood, on one hand, neither do they have an unequivocal understanding imbricated within their own frameworks. Although none of these categories dissipate, they are unpacked to reveal their opaque ideologies which bind them together in an intersection of ambiguity, it seems. Thus while nation is understood as an entity, very important to define the political subjectivity of women, it is the consciousness of this political subjectivity that allows women to unearth the workings of gendered politics within the framework of nation that results in inequalities pertaining to gender. Krishna rallies against the inequalities that women have always been made to suffer, instigating the 'Banglar meye' (Bengal's daughters) to rise from their stupor and claim their rightful place. Family becomes a site of constant battle for the women detective as this idea is also imbricated within the constricted idea of nation, where the family stands as a microcosm for the nation. The woman detective does not necessarily do away with

the idea of the family but occupies it differently, according to her choice, thus presenting a multivalent notion of family. There is a similar vein in her engagement with the idea of work, which imbibes its framework from the understanding of the public-private divide that also informs both the ideas of nation and family. When the woman detective allows the public-private notion to blur her personal, emotional and passionate engagement with her professional work, often bringing her work within the private space of the home, she renders a feminist perspective to work by feminising the process of detection where she brings in minute observations based on her domestic experiences and also involves her family into the work, like Mitin. The woman detective's encounter with violence, necessitated by her professional dealings with crimes committed against an individual or a collective, not only allows her to recognise the violence that lies beyond the very visibility of crime but also makes her realise that too much cynicism cannot be adequate to counter cruelty. As such she looks out for possibilities which can emerge from violence, possibilities of restoring life and living through a politics of hurt.

The woman writer of the woman detective brings into play an acute consciousness of her gendered existence to characterise the woman detective and trace her evolution, not only by mapping her way to victories, but also by charting her vulnerabilities, failures and weaknesses, thus challenging the heroic figure of the male detective who supposedly walks untarnished and alone through the gruesome surroundings. Neither is the woman detective untarnished by the societal conditions, nor does she trek a lonesome path. Her challenge is to find the most befitting solution to a problem, which might also lead her to adopt the lesser wrong. Thus the woman detective has to continuously challenge the societal norms to be able to carry out her detection in a world that is wary of accepting with seriousness a worldly woman conscious of her material reality. It is by her negotiations with these categories that bring up certain notions which might apply to comprehending the evolving subjectivities of the women detectives.

Women writers respond to and experience their ideologies from complexly constituted decentred positions within them because familial ideologies clearly constitute male and female subjectivities differently, as do ideologies of nation or Empire. Ideologies are also not contested in the same fashion. When these ideologies

are experienced, analysed and understood differently, they must result in the creation of different subjects, even among women themselves, because women cannot be understood as a monolith. While being a cultural construct, she also harbours an experiential reality. Thus, women writers may be read for the gestures of defiance or subversion implicit in them. But there must also be readings that does not lessen discontinuities, dispossession, or marginality but dramatizes or clarifies it.

This research, which explored select Indian women detective novels featuring women detectives, has been able to come up with the following, reflective of subjectivities of the women detectives:

Firstly, a notion of a liminal subjectivity evolves from the woman detectives' negotiation with the public-private divide. By crossing the *lakshman rekha*, that the society draws for a woman, the woman detective ventures into the public world challenging the idea of cloistered decency of a *bhadramohila*, and launches herself onto a battle of finding her credibility as a detective. She inspires surprise, doubt, and dismissal among the people she meets, which makes her inclusion quite problematic. While remaining the stereotypical 'other', she tries to reinvent herself by being part of a system that opposes her reinvention sternly. She has to constantly challenge the norms of a society which she intends to serve, as the terrain she chooses to operate in is markedly male, be it that of a law enforcer, or a logical, reasonable deducer, or, in her encounter with violence. As a professional detective she is insisting on asserting her power that is constantly denied to her by the gender-defined system. Thus she is always in an uncomfortable position in this public-private divide because of the demands she places on the society, which becomes wary of accepting her. From an uncomfortable position, she has to consistently direct her efforts to negotiate her terms with society through contestation and compliance. The woman detective must move out from the constrictions of her own private world to be able to direct her gaze into the private realm of other characters where crime breeds. However, her private, domestic realm does not stand obsolete to her. In the process of analysing crime it becomes imperative for the detective to take a close personal look into the crime. She must achieve this by a discreet separation of the emotional from the professional, a separation of the public world of crime and the private world of being. However, for the woman detective this discreet distinction becomes almost impossible where she continuously finds her

private, subjective experiences and understandings impacting and blending into the dimensions of professional work, in the feminisation of the detective process. Thus the argument that the two spheres of the public and private can work in isolation does not hold good for the woman detective, who, thereby, renders newness to the very idea of professional work and also the subjectivity of the middle class urbane working woman. The private/public, therefore, emerges as a purposeful fictive constitution to pamper the state building enterprise which is definitely gendered as it confines one gendered understanding to promote the other. In the building of the figure of the detective, the detective being created to disseminate the fear of an all-powerful state, it becomes imperative to highlight its maleness to facilitate easy acceptance of an established convention that the public realm, the realm of law and justice is a male domain. The entry of women detectives is not only seen as an intrusion into the established and popular male domain, but is also seen as a violation of the state build conditions of the public/private dichotomy. Hence, it is the very presence of the woman detective that breaks down the hegemonic notion of the divide and forwards the creation of a liminal subjectivity who stands at the threshold of the divide, neither accepting nor completely rejecting the construct. She confers new meanings to those categories which are imbricated within the notion of public and private- family, nation and work- which are relevant to her existence, where she is not confined by their hegemonic, monolithic understandings but experiences it based on her insistence, her choice. Hence while Mitin can be a home maker and a detective, Lalli can simply do away with such distinctions turning her workplace into her home and vice versa. As the women detectives encounter the challenges of their personal and professional lives, their experiences become extremely relevant to the comprehension of being which is always in process.

With this understanding of liminality is entwined the understanding of middle class women subjectivities evolving out of the politics that informs such a stand. It must be realised that middle class is also a social and cultural construct where commonalities are thrust to create homogenous understanding. It tries to deny multiple points of emergence and make identities monolithic. However, it must be realised that any form of identification cannot be uncritical. In fact criticality, which fosters nuance, is important for doing politics, which definitely makes the doing difficult, but at the same time enriches it. It creates a scope to understanding privilege and thus, strategise.

The moment one becomes comfortable in one's subject position, it forecloses possibilities, foreshadows nuance. When there are multiple coordinates in a subject position, it allows friction to occur which opens possibilities.

It is the marginal existence of the woman detective and her constant negotiations with precarity that makes her conscious of her position as a middle class urban woman subjectivity, which despite being a position of privilege with respect to other positions of precarity, also has its own limitations. The consciousness of her own limitations as a woman seems to generate the possibility of a self-referential agency where agentiality could emanate from a centrifugal force generated by the inward looking process which allows the consciousness to move from the self to the others. This centrifugal force, thus generated, might blur the boundaries of self and other, and allow women to forge solidarities based on shared experiences of exclusion, of being the outsider, of occupying the peripheries, of sharing the state of hurt. The sense of solidarity, thus, formed might not only dismantle boundaries of class, caste, religion and such other coordinates, at the face of the commonality of being a woman, but also create possibilities which emerge from the friction caused between the given and the resistant. While it might seem that such a possibility would tend to ameliorate the politics of differences by an essentialist agenda, on the other hand, it would be thoroughly conscious of the divergences and convergences that goes into the making of a women's identity, which is not a given and in the process of being. Thus this would allow women to occupy their subjective positions with a lot of critique, where the friction between acceptance and resistance would lead to the formation of a subjective position that cannot have a linear comprehension. An uncritical subject position would be a position of privilege, from where self-referentiality and the consequent critique of the subject position are impossible. But anyone who stands on the podium of exclusion is bound to hold that position with a lot of critique and hence, be self-referential, as is the case of the middle class urban women detectives analysed in the research, who by constantly upsetting the complacency of their subject positions also trouble the conventionality of gendered ideas. The norms of gender are meant to be transgressed and critiqued as a matter of everyday existence, but they cannot be diffused altogether, just as the ideas of nation, family, work, or violence cannot be diffused. What the woman detective seems to be doing is occupying these spaces with critique; the friction

thus created allows possibilities of nuance which is how her subject position can be viewed.

It is in such an understanding, perhaps, that the idea of forging empathetic solidarities lies even at a time when “globalising capitalism and associated processes of individualism, localisation and privatisation contribute to a sense of social numbness, a perceived failure of empathy and a disavowal of the need for solidarity” (Breda Gray<sup>vii</sup> 224). However, the presence of an ‘ethical emotional grammar’ which moves forward towards the creation of feminist solidarities is strongly visible in the characterisation of the women detectives whose subjectivities are constantly influenced by the transformative, progressive and ethical moments of empathy. While one may point at the hierarchical flow of empathy, it may be argued that the very idea of self-referential agency takes view of this precariousness that might exist in an empathetic relationship and allow to “keep responsibility, difference and critical reflexivity at the heart of feminist empathetic identification” (Gray 209). As such while empathy tries to create solidarities beyond boundaries, it also contributes effects to certain boundaries. Hence, while empathy enables the woman detective to be touched by the pain of others across the boundaries of class, caste, gender, religion, it also allows her recuperate from the pain and suffering she must undergo emotionally, psychologically and physically in order to ponder on that which can console anxieties, conjure hope and resist blatant cynicism. It is in the encounter with the state of hurt that a contact zone is formed from where empathetic solidarities may be forged which also leaves its imprints in the subjectivities which try to create. This might in turn allow the reclaiming of idea of a pre-colonial community of women where interchanges and exchanges were not delimited by caste, class and other such coordinates.

The meanings rendered to the subjectivity of the woman detective can emerge from her understandings of her limitations which allow her to constantly negotiate with her vulnerabilities. This, in turn, seems to allow her to evolve as a risk-taking subject, where the idea of risk-taking is associated with empowerment (Menon<sup>viii</sup> 143), dismantling the element of discouragement and vulnerability associated with the idea of risk. The woman detective constantly brushes she shoulder with violence where she cannot allow violence to cower her down. She overpowers her vulnerabilities, which definitively emerge as a social construct to contain women, and tries to negotiate her

position by risking her very being. However, being within the reality of the social constructs of vulnerability she cannot help but be fearful. On hearing about the disappearance of the British girl, Lisa, from the beaches of Goa, Simran becomes concerned about the safety of Durga and sends her home, while she plunges into the vortex to solve the case (*TSOI*). It is in these constant negotiations with the construct of vulnerability, that feminists demand equal access to risk-taking, not based on the idea of safety and protection, but based on the idea that risk taking is a legitimate demand of women from the state, where women would be treated as equal to men in the domain of taking risks. The precondition to this risk-taking is to put pressure upon the state machinery to “provide infrastructure so that women can *choose* risk-taking behaviour rather than having risk enforced on them at every step” (Menon 143). Hence, this is not about ensuring safety for women in all places, as that would endorse the limitations based on women’s vulnerabilities, but about ensuring quick redressal for the wrongs committed upon women, about establishing unequivocal rights for women (ibid: 143). and also about refurbishing the very idea of violence as not something that should cower down the violated, but should make the violater conscious of the wrong committed. The idea of ‘risk-taking’ allows women and other marginalised categories to come out of the pervasive culture of fear that they are bound to live in. This also allows recognition of the fact that in their actual lives the marginalised always continue to live by surmounting their fear, just as the women detectives do.

This opens up another dimension of understanding the evolving subjectivity of the woman detective where she concerns herself with the idea of violence. While the social construction of violence tends to limit our comprehension and negotiation with violence, it also seems to create the possibility of going beyond limits, once the limits are recognised. The positive relationship between violence and human freedom can emerge from the idea that the point of recognition of violence might also become a site of resistance to violence, which eventually leads to a scope for emancipation and hope. Moreover as the structures of dominance tend to strike at the possibilities of every day being, the very opening up of such possibilities would have to be a violent event that would vehemently resist those structures of dominance (Has<sup>ix</sup> 35). It is in such resistance that agential possibility lurks. The everyday experience of the woman detective within the constraints of a gendered existence makes her keenly conscious of violence, so much so that as risk-taking subject, she continuously resists its

omnipotence. Her compulsive, often passionate, unpacking of the intricacies of cases can be understood as her violent intervention into the corrupt, biased, unethical, inept institutions- like the judiciary, the police system, the state, religion, family, education- where she not only poses uncomfortable questions, but also lays bare the violent frameworks of these institutions. While the woman detective must remain intricately attached to these institutions in order to unravel their workings, she is also able to rise above the limitations of these institutions, to emancipate herself and to eke out a new world order in the peripheries of her existence.

In this way she also forges another important possibility- the possibility to narrate violence, to allow it to emerge out of its silences, by overturning the patriarchal ideologies of dishonour, shame, disrespect often associated with the victim of violence. In *GL*, when the rapists are caught, Lalli makes sure they are humiliated by men, keeping the women away. When asked the reason, she says she wanted the press to show that the rapists are being humiliated by men so that "...young men who think of rape as an act of daring can see it for what it really is...the ultimate failure....The cry, *How can I bear that someone should use my body like this?* is usually read as a woman's outrage. But isn't it equally a man's?" (Swaminathan, *GL*, 149)<sup>x</sup>. This narration of violence is not to stimulate voyeurism, but to stimulate recognition, which allows establishing relations with women undergoing similar pain, and therefore initiate a healing process. Panchali Ray<sup>xi</sup> suggests that this healing, while bridging the gap between individual experiences of pain to a larger collective, transforms pain and politicises it (281), thus allowing that pain to mobilise, to create solidarities in order to overturn the patriarchal ideology of violence itself.

Thus the challenging terrain that women as writers and characters have inherited can be seen to be closely related to the realities of what it means to be a woman which, again, is not a given, a historical category. The negotiations, debates, connections, differences which inhabit this category of woman seems to find apt representation within women's texts which emerge as documents of the historical struggles that women have undergone in the process of evolving as citizen-subjects. This process is by no means complete, neither is it a radical progress towards emancipation, but is achieved through contingent moments of empowerment that involves the acts of contestation as well as compliance. These stimulating terrains that



women have inhabited continuously reshape the engagement with women's writings, especially in a genre that is constantly influenced and in turn influences mass understandings, like the popular genre of detective fictions where women have ventured as writers and detectives to reconstitute the gendered structure of the genre from the ever-evolving gender category of women.

Indian women's detective fictions featuring women detectives, therefore, present a viable area for fostering South Asian studies in literature. This canon of detective fictions has been constantly interrogating norms and transposing it with newer understandings that defy any condition of constrictions. As narrative indigenisation allows it to enter the field through multiple points, the fictions encourage the method of pluri-cultural understanding of various frameworks pertaining to south Asian subjectivity. These fictions inspire sharpening interdisciplinarity as a method of understanding the various nuances embedded within the genre while also accommodating the notion of multiple subjectivities that emerge from the societal, historical, cultural and political complexities of the region, within its literary frame. It tries to dismantle the prejudiced notion of a citadel of themes within which South Asian literature is trapped and encourages to look into how these narratives of violence and crime forward the cause for contingent moments of hope and emancipation.

### **6.3.Looking Forward: Musing over scope for Futures**

The present research opens itself by diving into the politics of genre making, especially the making of the literary and commercial genres which are intricately linked to marketing strategies. In fact being market-induced categories, as is reflected upon in the discussion in the 'Introduction' to this research, these categories become interesting fields to induce a comparative study that could delve into the making of these categories of literature, into how these categories might overlap to dismantle the very basis of such categorization. Moreover, analyzing the marketing strategies related to the production and dissemination of these two categories of literature, especially as globalized marketing strategies tend to influence both the processes immensely, might bring up interesting and important studies related to the politics of production. The genre of detective fictions has a wide range of audience from juveniles to old aged. It might be interesting to look into the production and distribution practices of the genre which allows it to cater to such a wide ranging audience.

The research while trying to understand how the Indian canon of the genre has been influenced by the English canon of detective fictions has engaged in studying how the idea of the detective was ferried over through translations in regional languages of India. This figure of the detective was further indigenized by the regional authors which found a huge market for consumption by the Indian readers. However, it is interesting to note that while the idea of male detective found space in the regional detective fictions in India, the regional literatures remained somewhat wary of the popular and proliferating genre of women detectives by women writers in England. Except for the translation and indigenization of a few women detectives like Mrs. Marple, the urban working women detectives did not seem to find space in Indian languages. This definitely calls for scrutiny into the politics of translation which might have influenced such selective translations. Besides, it would also open up avenues to enquire and search into the kinds of women detective stories from the English canons which actually reached the regional canon of detective fictions in India and scrutinize the process of transliteration therein.

Moreover, it has been repeatedly stressed throughout the research that detective fictions are mostly set in urban areas, or in the mofussils with a rapidly growing urbaneness. Examination into urbanity and its association with detective fictions might indeed allow an understanding of the nature of precarity that lies within urbanity. What brings up such precarity in urban life which breeds crime? Most importantly, why is the genre apathetic towards rural settings? It is only in Hercule Poirot stories and in the stories featuring aged women like Miss Marple, or Bindi *pishi* that the genre has had a rural setting. What kinds of differences does the genre envisage through a rural and an urban setting? This insistent urban setting of the detective stories also seems to bring up another query - is there any relationship between gender and the setting of the genre?

The idea of gender and language also opens up an avenue for further exploration. Language is a site of power, politics, humour, intrigue. An exploration into the ramifications of language as it is used in the genre can reveal a lot about the way the genre has adjusted itself to the power setup within a culture, how the genre has negotiated with gender constrictions. In fact the idea of looking at women's writing the genre might allow an understanding of how women might or might not have been able to overturn the masculine verisimilitude of the genre. A exploration into the language

of the genre will also open up literary exploration of the genre which might contribute to understanding genre conventions from a literary view point while also pointing towards a socio-cultural understanding of the genre.

In fact, the genre of detective fiction because of its blurred boundaries and fluid nature can easily move into different contours of critical reading, making it one of the most vibrant area of critical study. This research has tried to read into select Indian women detective fictions written by Indian women writers to comprehend the evolution of women subjectivities by evaluating contingent moments of emancipation as the woman detective negotiates with the categories of nation, family, work and violence which continue to pervade Indian women's subjective positions.

### NOTES

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<sup>i</sup>Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay. al. "Introduction: Indian genre fiction- languages, literatures, classifications." *Indian Genre Fictions: Past and Future Histories* edited by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Aakriti Mandhwani, Anwasha Maity. Routledge. 2019. pp. 1-14.

<sup>ii</sup>Sourindramohan Mukhopadhyay, "Bindi Pishir Goyendagiri" (n.d.) in Nirendranath Chakraborty edited *Meyera Jokhon Goyenda*. New Script. 2019. pp. 1-13.

<sup>iii</sup>Nirmalya Ghosh, "Goyendanir Shaatkahan" in *Bangla Goyenda Sahitya Sankha*, edited by Tapash Bhaumik, *Korok Sahitya Patrika*, 2017. pp. 67-79.

<sup>iv</sup>Priyamvada Gopal, Review of "Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present. Edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. Volume 1: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century. New York: The Feminist Press, 1991. Volume 2: *The Twentieth Century*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1993." *Oxford Literary Review*. 1994. pp. 287-294.

<sup>v</sup>Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, "Introduction", *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present: Vol. I: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century*, edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. The Feminist Press. 1991. pp. 1-37. [archive.org/https://archive.org/details/womenwritingin00thar](https://archive.org/details/womenwritingin00thar). Accessed on 20.03.2020.

<sup>vi</sup>Meera Kosambi. "Introduction: Men and Women Writing Gender" in *Women Writing Gender: Marathi Fiction Before Independence*, edited by Meera Kosambi. Permanent Black, 2012. pp. 1-77.

<sup>vii</sup>Breda Gray. "Empathy, Emotion and Feminist Solidarities". *Sexed Sentiments: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Gender and Emotion*, edited by Willemijn Ruberg and Kristine Steenberge. Rodopi, 2011. Pp.207-232.

<sup>viii</sup>Nivedita Menon. *Seeing Like A Feminist*. Zubaan and Penguin Books, 2012.

<sup>ix</sup>Yusuf Has. "Towards a Historical Ontology of Violence." *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, vol. 62, no. 142, 2015. pp. 26-49.

<sup>x</sup>Kalpana Swaminathan. *Greenlight*. Bloomsbury, 2017.

<sup>xi</sup>Panchali Ray. "Towards a Politics of Pain: Building Solidarities, Breaking Silences in Contemporary Chhattisgarh, India." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2019, pp. 271-284.

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