In a thesis of this kind where a substantial portion revolves around the “experiences” of one hundred women professionals, the researcher owes a hefty debt to all of them. For a panoptic comprehension, he has attempted his best to articulate the whole gamut of their experiences in appropriate contexts. However, while pursuing his field study, the fieldworker has come across many respondents whose life history is quite appealing. In fact, it is very difficult to remain indifferent to and unmoved by the kind of sufferings they have undergone, constraints they have encountered, challenges they have taken up, zeal they have sustained and efforts they have made to reach their destination. The present exercise is an endeavour to selectively delineate life history of eight women professionals (of two respondents from each profession).

SECTION-I
POLICEWOMEN

a. Namita Patra: Gritty Cop with a Creative Mind

The journey of Namita prior to employment and post-employment is replete with adventure, determination and zeal. Although she hails from a family having average financial background, where her father has to support five of her siblings, she has never allowed herself to be bogged down by family’s financial constraints. To be an employed woman has always remained her childhood aspiration. In spite of the absence of a decent financial support for pursuing education, she has never allowed her economic crisis to stand as a bottleneck in her learning career. Matriculated from a local school in Cuttack city nearby her place of origin, she preferred to take her intermediate and graduation degree from an excellent college in the capital city of Orissa. The reason was praise-worthy. Education in the capital would broaden mental horizon and diversify one’s imagination. Her spirit was twofold: one, to obtain higher degree on the educational front; two, to acquire a decent
government job, which would give her financial freedom and independent identity. Most importantly, it would enable her to support her family (i.e., family of origin) financially. Accordingly, her initiative after graduation became doubly challenging: to pursue post-graduation in Utkal University and write public recruitment examinations simultaneously.

The road not taken is always charming. But the road never before traveled is, in the human mind, filled with fear, uneasiness, danger lurking at every turn. Yet, it is a fact of life that achievers are quite often the ones who, with fire in their belly, ice in their veins and unhindered ignition in their mind, venture into the seemingly 'dangerous path', a path that is often highly stigmatized against women. Yes, we are talking about the profession of police. And yes, Namita did join it despite its serious masculine and anti-woman image.

In the milieu of Orissa, the profession of police is not viewed as a socially desirable job for a woman. In fact, police itself is seen as an anti-feminine profession. For a woman, joining police implies treading the path of a series of turbulences, risks and social humiliations. But as it is obvious, in a situation where family's financial condition is in shambles demanding urgent monetary support, one feels compelled to capture whichever employment prospect one receives. The reason is quite revealing. Under conditions of poverty, economic considerations rule the roost. Joining police was, hence, a compulsive option for Namita. Moreover, not to be a liability for parents was another reason why she took up the job of a police.

Namita's on-the-job experience is fraught with tensions, stress and frustration. Despite her competent performance, she hardly attracts plaudits from her male co-workers. But what is unique to her personality is that despite the prevalence of masculine and discouraging ambience, she continues with her work being almost unshaken by adversities.

True, she attained financial independence and an independent identity. But she had never speculated in the wildest of her dreams that she would have to pay a heavy price for her decision to take to the job of a police. As a WSI, she is looked
down upon socially. Though employed, a WSI is not a desirable bride in matrimonial market, as she is seen as a masculine woman. Consequently, Patra has forgot her dream of getting married and continues to be a spinster against her own will. Job has taken toll on her marital prospects. In the absence of decent matrimonial proposals, Patra’s alienation, loneliness, agony and depression at a personal-social level is quite shocking.

Yet depression does not deter the determined. Pent up feelings cannot pulverize one’s creative potential. Despite being stigmatized at the professional as well as personal level, Patra never neglects her passion for creative writings in vernacular language. Creativity knows no bounds. And that’s what we observe in Patra’s journey. Neither her round-the-clock assignments nor her lifelong frustration in her private life have proved to be an obstacle in the spontaneous expression of her creativity. A regular contributor to Oriya journals, magazines and newspapers, Patra has created a niche for herself in the literary horizon of Orissa. Today she is more known in Orissa as a creative writer for her poetry, feature articles, stories and women tips. That explains the victory of creativity over career anxiety, of zeal over job and of dynamism over difficulties. This also explains, it is possible to give expression to one’s creative agency in spite of several sufferings and stigmas integral to one’s career. As Patra avers, ‘it is through writings, publishing and fame that I feel exalted and seek to overcome my private depression’

The tale of Namita appears shocking, but it ends up with an encouraging note. That is, amidst Himalayan frustrations, it is practicable to discover joy in other realms of life, build up another identity independent of one’s profession and remain continually dynamic.

b. Rashmi Behera: A Symbol of Commitment and Sacrifice

Hailing from a poor family in a village under Kendrapara district, Rashmi’s ascent to the profession has not been a smooth affair. She dares where other shy away. She goes relentlessly ahead where others equivocate. Among many problems that surrounded her father, to support his six children (2 sons and 4 daughters) was the tallest like the Everest. Rashmi has faced untold ordeal to climb the educational
ladder. Although it was becoming extremely difficult for her father, a cultivator, to feed his family, he was trying his best to somehow support her education, as she was doing exceedingly well in her class. He was running from pillar to post to pay for her admission, purchase books and provide related ‘maintenance’. Even, he has promoted her at the cost of other children. Being the eldest child in the family, Rashmi has been a witness to father’s misery, siblings’ helplessness and her own ordeal. In fact, she has grown with innumerable hardships. Her decision to join any job that comes first has been shaped by her socioeconomic constraints.

The day she joined as WSI, was the happiest day in her life, because, she was determined to transform the entire condition of her parental family. Although she was aware of the negative repercussions of holding a cop’s job, she could not say ‘no’ to the offer and ultimately took up the job. Reason? She had to support her family, finance her brothers’ education and bear her sisters’ matrimonial expenses. Astoundingly, she lived upto her commitments; transformed family’s economic conditions; added to its assets in terms of land and money; supported the education of her brothers and sisters and borne the entire expense of her sisters’ marriage.

Fortune never smiled in her own favour. She too, like many other WSIs, became a victim of her own profession: she is still a spinster. Paradox has always been another name of patriarchy. The brothers, whose cost of education had been almost entirely borne by Rashmi, are now finally settled in their life. Ironically, they are now persuading her to quit her profession, as it defames ‘their’ family reputation. Determined as she is, Rashmi is unshaken by any such persuasions. She is quite bold on her own decision to resort to her job till the age of her retirement, even though her own siblings and relatives desert her in future.

Sacrifice constitutes the hallmark of Rashmi’s life-world. It is true that khaki has taken its toll on her marital prospects. It is also significant to note that the department of police itself is male dominated. A lady cop is socially seen in bad taste. Assuming the role of a police implies inviting a heap of calumnious hearsays and stigmas. But what is commendable about Rashmi is that despite such calumnies, hearsays, stigmas and adverse ambience at workplace, she has proved herself as a
woman of sacrifice at a very personal level. She has never allowed her employment-related adversities to interfere with her contribution to her parents and siblings. She symbolizes a kind of woman who takes joy in bringing joy in others’ lives whom she emotionally loves. As she candidly puts it, ‘true, I remained unmarried. But then, many women in world are also not married. But I always feel proud that I have successfully shouldered the entire burden of my family. It is purely due to my individual sacrifice that all of my siblings are now comfortably settled in their personal lives.’

On the professional front, the adverse ambience prevalent in the department is well known to Rashmi. The male cops are fanatic male chauvinists and the department itself is a den of patriarchy. Even there are policemen whose thirst at time dotes upon the physical ‘body’ of their lady colleagues. In spite of all such odds, Rashmi appears to have mastered the art of sailing her ship against adverse weather.

SECTION-II
WOMEN DOCTORS
a. Minati Patnaik: Married to the Service of Mankind

Not all people are divinely ordained to cure mankind, serve masses and eliminate their ailments. There are very few blessed ones who are destined to adopt the noble charge of healing people and keep them happy. Minati is a symbol of one such a blessed woman with an incessant passion for recuperating people. Her father was a class III employee in the Indian Railways. She had five sisters and thus belonged to a family having average financial background. Born in a small village under Khurda district, Minati had an inclination for the profession of medicine since her childhood. Although her financial background was not decent enough to adequately sponsor her medical education, she was firm enough to reach her destination. Fortune often favours the destined ones. Minati secured a seat for her in medical entrance.
Everything is divinely destined says the doctor for her achievement. A dignified and humble personality as she is, she takes pride not for her position, but for people’s faith in her healing hand. She is famous in her place of posting (currently Balugaon) for two things: one, as a very good doctor with a magic hand that creates miracles; two, as a down-to-earth human being who has taken service as a calling and whose religion hinges on the spiritual belief that service to mankind is service to god. True, Minati spells out, god exists everywhere: in me, in my patients and in my service. Without him I exist not. Without me, he manifests not.

While Minati’s professional career is astounding, her personal life is fraught with challenges, tensions, agony and commitments. Immediately after she got employed, she had got the responsibility of supporting three of her sisters. She had to bear the entire cost of their matrimonial expenses. What is conspicuous in her life is her own marital status.

It is true that lady doctor is a highly desirable bride in matrimonial market. It is also true that Minati has come across a series of attractive proposals. But as a responsible member of her family, as the most qualified person and as the only earning member after her father’s death, she decided to shoulder the entire burden. She got all her remaining three sisters married off; took care of maintaining the homoeostasis of her family. In the process she herself remained unmarried. She devoted her entire youth for family’s sake. And the moment, almost all of her burdens got over, she had crossed her marriageable age. Eventually, destiny rendered her a spinster. In fact, she is the only unmarried woman among all women doctors studied for the purpose of the present research.

Patience, service and sacrifice constitute integral part of Minati’s life. As she enounces, ‘in this profession, empathy and patience are vital for a doctor in order to sympathetically deal with his/her patients who come with a sense of utter helplessness, hopelessness and dependence.’ True, she lives in a state of perpetual
alienation from a matrimonial point of view. And, yet, she is unperturbed by such irritants in her private life. She is a brave woman who has evolved her own personalized way of coping with private stressors.

But dynamic as she is in her orientation, Minati has a different approach to her life. As she says, perhaps God has made me a doctor to respond to people’s disease. He does not want me to get tied to any private obligation, which may affect my service to mankind. But that does not mean, Minati is now leading a carefree life in her private domain. It appears, service is integral to her identity both at professional and personal level. At present, she personally looks after two disabled females in her residence, who happen to be her relatives. That’s is nutshell, Minati’s magnificent work in her ‘this worldly’ life.

b. Sharmistha Sarangi: An Achiever Par Excellence

Sharmistha’s life history reflects a reversal of fortunes. She hails from a family in Rourkela with a good financial backbone. Her father was Principal in a mega engineering college. He has been blessed with one daughter (that is Sharmistha) and two sons.

Finance has never been a constraint in Sharmistha’s educational career. Of course, she was very brilliant, hard working and consistent in her effort. As ‘to be a doctor’ was her childhood choice, she was consistently doing well in her studies in order to make her dream into reality. It is said, destiny does not dishearten the determined. With a highly supportive family by her side, she was quite optimistic in her goal. It was a moment of ecstasy the day she got the news that she had obtained a seat in medical entrance. Sharmistha is one of those achievers whom fortune has always followed them. She is, at present, posted in one of Orissa’s best hospitals, that is Kalinga Hospital, that too, in its intensive care unit (ICU).
At the professional front, she is doing just the miracle. An achiever with an urge to excel, she has proved to be a dab hand in her sphere of service. Yes, it is not that simple to be chosen for an assignment at ICU. She discepts the conventional prejudice which veers around the idea that women medical candidates have a natural inclination for gynecology and pediatrics. Although her splendid performance attracts negligible approbation from male doctors, she never awaits their appreciation. She knows, she needs to perpetually outperform in order to prove her ability better than men. What is notable in her episode is that despite her belongingness to an affluent background, she has retained a magnificent approach to service. As he utters, "although men think that we are relatively non-serious, we do not pay heed at them. Our happiness comes from our service, concentration and patients' blessings".

At the matrimonial level, Sharmistha’s case is a joyful one. A happily married woman, as she is, she tries her best to respond adequately to both the domains: professional and private. Fortunately enough, though she has got a supportive family, she overworks to do justice to her dual commitments. According to her, prioritization and sincere commitment to one’s responsibilities are the key to one’s successful management of dual responsibilities. As she utters, ‘be professional and exercise professionalism/appropriate dedication in every aspect of your life. Punctuality is one of the most important aspects. Punctuality as an everyday practice can easily be developed by every sincere professional.’ Although she attaches primacy to her family, she strives hard to contribute sincere service to her profession. However, she does confront the pressure of ‘double-burden’: ‘mother-wife-homemaker’ commitment on the one hand and professional responsibilities on the other. Yet, she toils to dovetail the demands of both the worlds: the public and the private. She never allows her ‘affective’ attachment to affect her professional pursuit and endeavours to hold both the expectations in a state of equipoise. As she
aptly believes, satisfaction drawn from both makes her complete and enables her to specialize further in her profession.

SECTION-III

WOMEN ACADEMICIANS

a. Asha Hans: A Shining Jewel in Academic Empire

Hailing from a business family in Bhubaneswar, Asha’s ascent to academics is a story of aim and determination. Her life history shares similarity with that of Minati Patnaik on three courts. One, Asha, too, is a spinster owing to certain personal constraints. Two, she manifests an example of a cumulative ascender on her professional front. Three, she has never allowed her loneliness in her private life to impinge upon her professional ascent.

Academics, as we have discovered, is a domain that is not only male-dominated, but also male academicians are no less chauvinists. Academic women in general are dubbed as in sincere, not up to date, and not capable as like men. A woman’s performance, whatsoever, is never recognized. This is the ambience where Asha, like a lotus, has blossomed into a resplendent academician.

Academics, to Asha, comes as a calling. She is a continuous learner in her own discipline of political science. Be it teaching or research, she is a dab hand at both. She is one of those very few lady academicians in Orissa who have been envy of male colleagues. Her creative writings speak volumes about her academic wizardry. Apart from wonderful teaching, she has seven books, more than forty articles (both national and international) and also more than forty reports/monographs to her credit. It is here that she stands taller than many of her male counterparts. Asha’s academic excellence dispels the dogma that satisfaction on the personal front decides satisfaction on the professional front.

Besides teaching and research, Asha carries the potential of a good administrator/manager. Apart from holding the department of political science in
Utkal University, she also holds the position of the Director, Women’s Studies in the same University. In fact, she is the only academic woman in the University who possesses and successfully runs two centres simultaneously without any apparent friction. She vindicates the asseveration of many women professionals that a woman do possess knack for administration. At a time when women academicians are deliberately ignored in matters of allocation of administrative responsibilities with the implicit pretext that they are incompetent in such matters, there are also women like Asha who have the spunk to surge ahead and invade domains of male concentration.

On the one hand, Asha’s professional life keeps the observer spell-bound; on the other, her private life reveals a shocking discovery. Yes, Asha has remained a spinster owing to certain deeply personal compulsions, which she passionately avoids to reveal and repeat. Despite such compulsions, what is commendable is her firm decision to stay a life-long single woman. She has proved beyond doubt that it is possible for an employed woman to lead a dignified life without the company of a matrimonial male partner. She has also proved that agony (at a personal level) cannot ail one’s aim. It is possible to completely overcome one’s personal grief and attain complete joy in one’s career. An ignited achiever in professional career, she has developed an optimistic approach to her spinster’s life. She has been able to convert her alienation (at a personal level) into an advantage by singularly devoting herself to academics. As she states, ‘an unmarried woman can better excel in career than a married one.’ No doubt, Asha has attained the acme of academics: in teaching as well as research. She has proved to be a role model for millions of women aspiring to assume a career in academics. With her rich contribution to academics, Asha can be seen as a Maslow’s variant of self-actualized individual.

b. Manorama Biswal Mohapatra: A Radiant Star in the Galaxy of Oriya Laureates

Manorama’s life is another stimulating account of grit, gumption and perfection. Although she belongs to a family in north Balasore having a good
financial background, her firmness to pursue higher education particularly at a time when girl child’s education was hardly encouraged is quite commendable. Since her childhood, Manorama had a penchant for meaningful vernacular writing. True to her interest, she completed her M.A. degree in Oriya literature from Viswa Bharati University, Shantiniketan. She has been in teaching profession since 1971 onwards.

Manorama differs from Asha in one respect and coincides with her in another. She coincides in the sense that like Asha, Manorama has reached the acme of her career. She differs in the sense that unlike Asha, she is a married professional who is undaunted by the double-burden of college and kinship. True, blending career and kinship is really a difficult task. But Ms. Mohapatra proves that it is possible to harmonize both and excel resplendently as a career woman. She represents a variant of those outstanding achievers who aim to educe joy from family and career and never allow the former to jeopardize the latter.

After making a niche for herself in academics, she continues to dominate the literary scene. Apart from teaching, Ms Mohapatra’s uncanny knack for writing has made her a public figure, who is extolled for her creative contribution. So far, her marvelous wit has bagged more than thirty awards to her credit. As an academic, both teaching and research continue to be a part of her everyday specialization. She has hitherto contributed more than forty publications to the treasure of Oriya as a domain of literature. As a rare intellectual, she has represented Orissa in many platforms/conferences – both national and international. Even though her literary brilliance draws glacial appreciation from male co-workers, her creative proclivity for producing the best keeps her moves perpetually accelerating.

Although Manorama is a married professional familial commitment has never jeopardized her zeal to flourish professionally. It is true, both career and familial commitments are contradictory to each other. It is also true that both the commitments weigh heavily in her imagination. Yet, she has been able to resolve the dissonance and contribute to both the extremes. She affirms the view that a married woman/mother can also become a marvelous professional; an ‘affective’ homemaker
can also prove to be an achieving academician. It is possible to take parenting seriously and it is also possible to shine in one’s academics resplendently.

True, Manorama is at the fag end of her employment. But there is no retirement for creative academicians like her, who are given to research and writing and who draw their joy from their endless creative accomplishments. But her retirement is absolutely impossible till her literary contributions reside in the treasure of Oriya literature. She will continue to be considered as one of those rare shining stars in the galaxy of Oriya laureates whose intellectual radiation will inspire millions till the life span of Oriya as a language.

SECTION – IV
WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS
a. Bidyatlata Devi: An Administrator with a Difference

Bidyatlata, a village girl in the district of Khurda, was just nine years old when her father died. Three sons, one daughter and his wife survived him. It was then a state of complete darkness for the family. Fortunately enough, her maternal uncle came to their rescue and rehabilitation. With her father’s demise, Bidyat’s determination to become an esteemed officer got recalcified. Even her uncle was mesmerized to witness the extreme degree of achievement motivation of this young girl in such a nascent stage of her education. Therefore, he decided to take care of her educational cost in particular and that of her siblings in general. Hence, it is in the backdrop of this situation, Bidyut’s education has been almost sponsored by her maternal uncle. Of course, in the mean time, her mother completed matriculation and joined as a schoolteacher when she was just twelve. Even after that the uncle decided to take care of Bidyut and one of her brothers; her mother looked after the rest two sons.

Destiny ultimately proved that she was not painting dreams or nightmares; rather, she was painting her own reality. Yes, at the sharp age of twenty-two immediately after her graduation, she was appointed as Fishery Extension of Officer
under the government of Orissa. She is now 47, working as Deputy Superintendent Fisheries (DSF). She is doubly skilled in the sense that as a married woman she has never allowed her marital family to negatively impinge upon her career and vice versa. In a sense, Bidyut has proved to be an *au fait* in the art of multitasking. She has practically realized the importance of employment for a woman in contemporary patriarchal reality, as she has herself been an everyday witness to her mother’s ordeal who was widowed at a very young age.

Bidyut’s determination to take up an administrative job is not without any reason. She was particularly fascinated by the kind of *3Ps* that administrative personnel wield in personal and public life. She is well aware of the kind of male chauvinism/hegemony prevalent in administration. She is also aware of the attitude of male co-workers towards her intervention. She, too, has witnessed the uneasiness/unpreparedness of male subordinates to work under her. But what is encouraging to observe is that adverse ambience does not affect the ambitious achiever. As she sincerely put it, ‘barring exceptions, women in administration share a common experience: the experience of male superiority. It seems bit incongruous that men are yet to come to terms with the progress of civilization. Though their mindsets are gradually shifting, there are still hurdles.’ Despite her encounter with discouraging/demoralizing experiences, she accomplishes her tasks as an adventurous careerist who is completely undaunted by the surrounding hurdles. On the professional front, she functions on her own terms without leaving any scope for interference by male co-workers. She is viewed like a hard task officer in her department. While in office, she is hard and soft, rigid and flexible, assertive and considerate. It is owing to her independent functioning that wherever she is posted, her professional wit and personal demeanour augment her fame and make her presence felt both inside and outside office. At a time when employment is considered to be an important milestone for empowerment of women and when family is viewed as a major constraint confronting their professional life, Bidyut
manifests a case that explains that it is possible to lead a happy family life and also perform competently in one’s profession simultaneously.

b. Madhuri Naik: A Brave Lady with the Gumption to Take up the Gauntlet

Born in an affluent family in a village under Khurda district, Madhuri’s proclivity for administrative job grew at the age of twelve. As her father was a senior class-I officer in Orissa administration, she has never faced any monetary crisis till she completed her masters from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. Of course, her parents and siblings were highly supportive of her ambition.

Lucky as she has been since her childhood who was born with a silver spoon in the mouth, Madhuri successfully got through Orissa Public Service Commission examination and was allotted the category of Orissa Administrative Service (OAS). Like almost all administrative women, she was also attracted by the ‘3Ps glamour’ attached to the profession. As she avers, power, power, privilege, privilege, money, money: brighter than sunshine, taller than Everest, bigger than the Himalayas, more beautiful than Hema, Jayaprada, Rekha, Aishwarya and more sweeter than honey. Thus, if women are in possession of power and money, they need not require sympathy from others.

As a professional, Madhuri is a woman of challenge. We have thrashed out in details that administrative domain is a den of patriarchy where there is a tendency among men to trivialize women’s presence. And confronting such hostile ambience is nothing new to her. The senior thinks he is more efficient; the colleague speculates he is supercilious and the subordinate feels, it is embarrassing to work under a lady officer. It is in the backdrop of this discouraging milieu that Madhuri, an OAS officer, pursues her career. Spunky as she is in her approach, she cocks a snook at such anti-woman ambience and calls her own shots. Determined to function independently, Madhuri never entertains unjust and extra-professional requests, pretexts and discussions in her space. She has trashed the prejudice that women are dependent, docile and they lack the knack for administrative positions. It is owing to her uncommon wit that she is viewed as a masculine lady officer in her circle.
Chapter Five

The view annunciated by Madhuri is quite noteworthy. She enounces, ‘not many women can actually succeed in politics. But many women can actually succeed in getting employment in public work domain. Rather, this is the only viable medium through which women can assert their identity, independence and worth. This is the only available opportunity for women through which they can challenge patriarchy, counter subjection, bear risks in personal life and transform their life-world.’ True, Ms. Naik’s asseveration is in complete consonance with the contemporary slogan that employment is a principal medium of women’s empowerment.

While her professional life is full of grit, gumption, adventure, autonomy and discipline, a look at Madhuri’s personal life reflects a live story of silent suffering. Yes, she has obtained a dignified profession and has been deriving delight from her adventurous functioning. Yet, she had never speculated that the very job that she had plumped for would one day be a potential cause for her spinsterhood. We have raved about the issue in detail in foregoing chapters. True, at a positive level, employment has given her economic independence and an identity to lead a dignified life. At a negative level, its repercussion has been seriously baleful. She is unable to create her own family, experience the joy of ‘being a mother’ and realize happiness in her private life. Changes in women’s status are not simultaneously accompanied by corresponding changes in men’s thinking. While the former moves at a faster pace, the latter goes at a very-very slow rate. The resultant chasm between the two emanates to be sole cause of women’s ordeal. And the number of employed women falling victims to such chasm is very large. The ordeal of one Madhuri is just a tip of the iceberg.