Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation shares the assumption that literature consists of inscribed texts of discourse, and studies the interrelation between society, history and textuality in the context of depictions of women in short fiction by women writers. Part of the cultural process that generates and appropriates sexual difference, literary representations are decisive in determining the functional and ideological aspects of gender. The encounters these formulations register can be discerned in the ways in which they structure experiences, encode perceptions, reproduce social relations, constitute the subject, and shape the language and form of narrative writing. Fiction as a cultural practice is a device whose delineations, referents and effects attain embodied expressions in the "real." Any analysis of the gender question under the circumstances must stem from an understanding of the interaction of formal elements, ideological assemblages, and the junctions, intersections, interruptions and continuities of the dialectical relation between different systemic structures of oppression and of accommodation within the generative matrix of the text. These composite workings do not have a direct or simple bearing on the text, and account largely for the apparent projection of textual autonomy. This assumed position of independence however opens the text to interpretation and renders it a site of contestation that enables the reconceptualization of society and the reinscription of subjectivities. As the matter and consequence of ideological investments, fiction in addition
functions as a mediatorial force in contingent realities, covertly re-ascribing values to the materialities of such categories like gender, the subject, society and the polity. At this point it will be useful to rehearse some of the theoretical positions on which this thesis relies.

The Foucauldian concept of discourse is a complex of codes, signs and practices that constitute a body of social knowledge within which the world is brought into being. Regulated by certain systematic rules, discourse operates through a set of statements which are historically situated in origin, and which represent themselves as “truth” thus excluding other equally valid statements about the world. Its hegemonic nature gives it the impression of being central, transparent and hence requiring no further interpretation. But these aspects often draw attention away from the highly stratified, internally complicated and ambiguous formation of discourse. Inseparable from people’s thoughts, conscious interests and relations of power, it affirms the relative existence of those who employ its diction, directing and limiting any dialogue on them. As subjects they are assigned specific positions and differing functions enforced by the rules of system(s) and clusters of institutionally located discourses. These positions are themselves discontinuous and even contradictory, contributing to the dispersion or fragmentation of the subject across these sites (Threadgold 61). This implied constitutional relation between monopolistic knowledge and exclusionary power acquires substantive potency in signifying practices and discourse-forms including writing, given their integral role in organizing lived experiences.
Gender as a cultural artefact functions ideologically in the constitution of subjects. Discourses on gender seal the material alienation of women by the precise lack of any tangible representational definition. Women's dispersal as abstracted entities across diverse roles, models, images and appellatives thus endow them with a universal quality and a certain ahistoricism. The construction of the category of "woman" nevertheless points to a historically-framed process conditional on the play of conjunctural forces, a paradox easily overlooked by the naturalization and essentialization of the feminine referent. The ensuing disembodiment disqualifies women from those participatory practices--forms of organizational and institutional politics, economics and even history--considered fundamental to the determination of a socially-tenable self, denying them access to the public sphere. In the event, it is imperative that our "understanding of the problems of 'real' women cannot lie outside the 'imagined' constructs in and through which 'women' emerge as subjects" (Rajan10).

Ideas relating to the status of women in India are historical responses to specific socio-cultural developments, and are always relative and situational in application. They are correlative with core and family kinship structures, religious and gender-specific rituals and are inscribed in language and in narratives as varied as myths and fiction. Imbued with investments of desire that enact a politics of control, the framework of ideologies that sustain these concepts are conducive to male interventions in the social. One should however recognize the necessary fact that patriarchies do not function alone in the subordination of women. They
always act in tandem with other axes of power and forms of stratification such as class, caste, religion, or community. Patriarchies in themselves are neither homogeneous nor autonomous or stable, but are liable to modification and reformulation with the changing social and political economies. Both material and discursive systems take part in the functioning of patriarchies although the relation between their respective practices are often marked by contradictions. Notions of class and caste invariably refer to economic and social histories. But, it is common knowledge that while caste sometimes operates in conjunction with class, one domain simply cannot be collapsed into the other. And, all these categories are gendered. of course. Given the gendered female’s simultaneous location at various ideological sites, her plural trajectories of conflicting and coincident knowledge structures, and the constant negotiations, contentions and transformations this entails at any historical moment, the emergence of an autonomous, unified subject is near impossible. Ideological affiliation(s) and agency in that event always involves a choice between competing, heterogeneous interpellations and is accompanied by a complex and conflicting process of collusions, consensus, oppositions and resistances. This multiple and indeterminate character of identity comprises a correlational “absence,” and is paralleled by a corruption of the self through traces of the suppressed other(s).

The cultural abstractions of woman’s roles and duties as “agency” is historically linked to the social constitution of notions of femaleness, self and identity (Sangari 378). These in turn are bound up with the histories of the family, community, class, caste, religion and nation-state. Existent
concepts of morality and value systems, legal discourses, religious and social economics of acquiescence, and modes of embodying the individual and the collective are constituent factors that rationalize woman's actions to herself.

The material order, like the discursive order, is a determinant in organizing women's identity and agency, interpelling them through relations of production and the division of labour. But it is the constellations of the hierarchy of positionality within each system, the nature of autonomy, and the degree of authority delegated to the female subject that decide the issue of women's agency here. The material and discursive practices of constituting agency may either coincide or run counter to one another. Besides, to discern agency in every challenge or resistance to forms of institutional authority and oppression is to overdetermine liberal concepts of autonomy, freedom, rights and justice. This kind of uncomplicated and symptomatic reading elides other possible forms of agency that occupy the province between existing possibilities and circumscribing structures of oppression. In fact, as Sangari has pointed out, women's agency can only be an approximation constituted by a specific kind of reading if not a reconstruction of its potentials (382).

Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as being imaginary--a notional political community, conceived as both inherently limited and sovereign--in a certain sense recognizes the potency of discourse in the formation of an imagined community (5). It also reiterates the fact that literary texts evolve interactively with specific historical formations. Gender
is a major referential node around which the re-articulation of the moral
and the psychological identities of the nation occur. Being a construct
amenable to semantic and hermeneutic interventions, it holds enormous
possibilities to women writers, with respect to its spheres of influence.
Portrayals of gender in texts have multiple origins. They emerge from the
complex interplay between the gendered author, social arrangements,
economics of race and gender, religious and life-cycle codes, political
ideologies, imaginative ascriptions, and aesthetic and formal conventions.
To further understand representations of women, it is pertinent to focus
attention on the complicity between the institutions of writing,
intertextuality, the transformations enacted in genre, and a certain woman-
specific gesture of writing, intimately yoked to the discourses of the nation.
Gender, in this analysis, is a term with dual meaning: on the one hand it
refers to depictions of women, female stereotypes, roles, cultural values and
norms. And on the other it is inseparable from the authorial mediations of
these delineations so that the concept of women’s writing achieves total
expression in the “female” text. The emphasis, therefore, is on a reading of
textuality rather than the treatment of text as a self-contained unit.

All forms of writing respond to certain cultural, professional, political
and economic requirements of the period in which they are executed. In
view of this, they may be said to be experiential art, conceived and
consolidated in real time. The categorization of women’s writing is based on
the gender of the writer, and on sweeping generalizations and an
undiscriminating treatment of women-centred themes despite individual
differences. It maintains its distinction and autonomy from mainstream
classification by adhering to a methodology and realm of study formulated by feminist criticism, and structured into a historical tradition. In India, the effort to constitute a history of women's writing is in its nascent stages. There is really no collective identity or movement women can refer to or derive strength from. Although there has always been present a sub-culture of women's literature in the form of both oral and written narratives, these however have been either lost to posterity or have been marginalized by the hegemonic masculine literary tradition. It is only very recently that women's writing has come to gain recognition as an independent branch of literature. Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha's anthology *Women Writing in India* (1991-1993) is perhaps the most comprehensive and informed collection that has taken the initiative to trace a women's movement in writing.

The concept of women's writing has its origins in the difficulty to situate the political questions raised by women within the traditional literary spectrum, closely identified as they are with the axis of male politics. The attempt to locate writing by women outside of conventional literary or political paradigms however has its own dangers, the most prominent being a certain dissociation with the historical and material contexts of women's problems. Women's writing, moreover, has evolved to such an extent that monolithic descriptive models simply do not work at all. Protesting against the ghettoisation of women writers who are accorded the position of only a woman writer, Tamil writer Ambai (C.S. Lakshmi) draws attention to yet another drawback, the gendered objectification of writers. She opposes the biological classification of writers, as it "does not in any way assess your stories. It already categorizes your stories..." (Dickman 32).
Adopting a contrary viewpoint, writers like Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande acknowledge differences between men’s writing and women’s writing, the latter perceiving the delicate nature of women’s writing, and the former “glad about the differences” and endorsing the need for such a separation (Dickman 32-33). A study at the level of aesthetics and discourse in that case will be more conducive to an understanding of women’s writings with their sources in political engagements. Such an enquiry deals with the way in which the text is constructed, shows the locations of meaning generation and power contestations, the purposes to which they are directed, the interests they serve, and how their susceptibility to revision holds possibilities for the transformation of the social sphere.

The selection of women writers for this thesis is geographically comprehensive to some extent, with regional variations manifest in perhaps the single most distinctive feature, language. Since the use of language is also the use of its cultural underpinnings, shared experiences assume diverse manners and differing modes of expression. These, in turn, form a supportive and revitalizing basis for new perspectives. The impression of uniformity underscoring this particular characteristic, the articulation of common ideological opinions and assumptions and the concern with the politics of the public and the private, imply a shared literary philosophy and validates the specific grouping of Qurratulain Hyder, Mahasweta Devi, Rajee Seth, Sarah Joseph and Vaidehi here. Despite their contemporaneity, one should not lose sight of the heterogeneity of the works resulting from cultural specificities of time and region and the compulsions of literary
traditions as well as their individual and stylistic peculiarities and the forms through which they mediate and deliberate on the nation, aesthetics and the gendered subject. The recurring thematic patterns, images and issues that emerge from the contextual complexities of experiences nevertheless suggest a participative cultural philosophy that subsumes the diversity of discourses interpellating them.

Before proceeding to a summary overview of the writers, a few observations pertaining to translation will be appropriate here, since the thesis discusses regional short fiction in translation. Translation is not a comparatively recent phenomenon nor is it alien to the Indian literary sphere. It has been creatively employed in the past, for instance, by poets like Thunchath Ezhuthachan and Kampan who have appropriated and rewritten the epic, the Ramayana, from a dominant language (Sanskrit) into the vernaculars of Malayalam and Tamil. Translation calls for a judicious and creative application of language and form in attempting to capture the distinctive style of the original work, in spite of the immense negotiations between cultures that they occasion. The subtleties in language, the different registers spoken by various communities, the hierarchies of class and caste and the linguistic and conceptual forms of one culture are inevitably subjected to a certain degree of manipulation when rendered into another language. A major obstacle encountered in the analysis of stories in translation relates to their significance within specific cultural contexts which may become obscure, when translated into another cultural milieu. Or as in the translations of writings by women, the implicit pressure to impart to the works a universal perspective often results in the inflection of
“the many, often marginalized, histories of struggles in which selves and worlds take shape with intelligible objects housed in familiar narratives” (Tharu, Foreword viii-ix). Therefore any reading must strive against reductionism not to mention the several delimitations inherent in translation.

Qurratulain Hyder was born in 1927, and grew up in a predominantly feudal and anglicized society that was witness to momentous local and international upheavals which transformed the composition and configuration of the world around it. Of special relevance are the personal experiences of the Partition, the psycho-social and cultural reverberations of which cast a shadow on her fictional narratives. This perhaps is why a sense of history is so much an integral component of her stories. Her immense historical knowledge is corroborated by scholarship, evident from the literary quality of her writings imbued with references to both Western and Indian literatures. As a matter of course, Hyder's works do not solely concern the Muslim community, but also narrate about other communities, their detailed descriptions being proof of close observation and sensitive comprehension. Humour, irony, nostalgia and melancholy find place in them side by side with her serious themes. The consummate story-teller, Hyder has published short stories, novels, novellas, reportages, and translations. Her first short story was published when she was barely sixteen and the first collection of short stories Sitaron se Aagey was published in 1947. A recipient of the Jnanpith Award, she had earlier received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1968 for the collection of her stories titled Patjhar ki Awaz (The Sound of Falling Leaves).
Hyder's location within the Urdu literary history is ambiguous and open to polemics due to the transitional nature of her writing. What is certain though is the seminal contribution she has made to Urdu literature with her innovative narrative techniques and highly individualized style, composed of formal and aesthetic elements that anticipated the modernist phase. In retrospect, this distinction only served to intensify differences with the then dominant Progressive school which was critical of what it considered her frivolous and superficial literary style, and the lack of social direction in the works. Regardless of such opinions Hyder has always asserted her engagement with socio-political issues, identifying and locating herself within the larger tradition of Urdu writers and literature (Khan 19). The fact that women writers have had considerable presence in Urdu literature over the past one hundred years further validates her position. Rasheed Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Razia Sajjad Zaheer, Siddiqa Begum Serharvi, Wajeda Tabassum, Jeelani Bano, Hajira Shakoor, Altaf Fatima, Khalida Husain and Zahida Henna are all writers who have registered the presence of a women's 'shadow' literary movement in its history. A related observation made by Hyder points out that for a society based on the principle of segregation, the practice of discriminating between man and woman does not extend to its literature (Kumar 20). Hyder's immediate predecessors were Sa'dat Hassan Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Krishen Chander and Ismat Chughtai, all of whom were writers of outstanding merit.

Mahasweta Devi (b. 1926), like the other vernacular writers discussed here, is an established writer, though she stands apart in the rich literary history of Bengal. Her writings have not always been
consistent, those of the early decades lacking the dedication and fervour of activism seen in the later works. Besides, she does not consciously subscribe to the notion of the gendered woman writer. She rather views the categories of woman and writer separately, and personally ascribes the influences of her times, her historical background, family and education to the complexity of her identity (Sharma 163). Despite recognizing the soundness of women’s issues, their demands, and their status in the material, theoretical and legal domains, Devi’s concerns about class exploitation and the oppressed supersedes gender considerations. This deliberate overlap of gender and class may be traced to her social activism with its roots in left ideologies. Any attempt to bracket her along ethnic lines on account of her peculiar equation with the subjects of her concern, the tribal peoples, however is a proposition she outrightly rejects. Nor does she entertain the label of a regional writer. She instead advances the referentiality of her works to lay claim to a national literary identity: “I consider myself an Indian writer because what I am writing could be true of any part of India” (Sharma 162). Devi’s experiences as a journalist endow her works with a poignant insight into reality. The documentary mode enables a factual recounting of histories, especially those old and marginalized ones which attain an immediacy and contemporariness when interwoven with the present. The ingenious manipulation of language to accommodate the jargon of particular classes or the patois of the tribal districts with its specific idioms, rather than deliberately exoticising her works, enhance their autochthonous flavour and effect a radical break with the subsuming and alienating discourse of mainstream aesthetics.
Agnigarbha (*Womb of Fire*), a collection of short political narratives, is one of Devi's most well-known works. Others include Nairete Megh, Stanyadayani, Chhoti Munda Evam Tar Tir and Murti. Apart from short fictions and novels Devi has authored plays, children's books, a historical fiction of the warrior-queen Laxmibai, Jhânsir Râni, and a chronicle of one of the tribes of India.

Rajee Seth (b.1935) commenced her career as a writer rather late in life, her first story being published when she was thirty-nine years old. Proficient in Comparative Religions and Indian philosophy, Seth’s publication include poems, novels, critical essays and short stories. Her novel Tat-Sam is a milestone in postmodern Hindi Literature. She writes exclusively in Hindi and has worked on a much critically acclaimed translation of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Letter to a Young Poet*. Eloquent, in spite of a certain elusiveness, her works are marked by profundity, intensity and complexity. They are introspective, transcending the superficiality of quotidian middle-class lives with its fiery ordeals, controlled passions, muted elations and deprivations. Running the risk of ambiguity with their profound meditations and concerns with what Seth calls the “invisible,” her narratives actually essay to unravel those complex networks of institutions and systems which seek to bind and mediate every aspect of life, and one’s self (Purewal, “Rajee Seth” 94). An allied purpose of her stylistic and formal expressions is to lay bare the ideological façades which men and women use as a pretext to evade the responsibility of their actions. The Hindi literary critic Prabhakar Shrotriya places Seth's writings in the lineage of such eminent male writers like Sachidanand Vatsyayan (Agneya), Jainendra
Kumar and Nirmal Verma (Purewal, "Rajee Seth" 96). But there has always existed a literary tradition of women writers in Hindi. Shivani, Krishna Sobti, Surya Bala, Shashi Prabha Shastri, Himanshu Joshi, Mannu Bhandari, Raj Kamal Choudhury, Mridula Garg and Mahadevi Varma are a few writers who have developed and extended the horizon and aesthetics of Hindi literature. And as a strong advocate for recognizing women writers as a separate category, Seth's stand that "a woman writer, just as a male writer, is essentially related to his or her own specific context and quality of experience," resists her inclusion into the hierarchical classification of mainstream literature (Dinesh 42-43).

The short story in Kannada literature is said to have originated in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Vaidehi (Janaki Srinivas Murthy, b. 1945), a writer of exceptional perspicacity and artistic felicity, whose perspective of the world is filtered through her gendered experiences and imagination withstands the appropriating classifications of Kannada literature. She none the less does not demonstrate in her writing any of the manifest characteristics that adherents of feminism subscribe to. The nostalgia-tinged recounting of a female sub-culture and use of the vernacular, typical features of her art, have expanded her stylistic range, formal techniques and thematic vision, and contributed to the development of the short story as a literary form. One must of course strive against the temptation to overlook the relatively independent growth of short fiction written by women or to align it with the evolution of various movements like the Bandaya (Rebel) movement, or the Modernist movement in mainstream Kannada literature. A few of the women writers who like Vaidehi have
charted a variant course of female sensibility are Triveni, Anupama Niranjana, Veena Shanteshwar, Rajalakshmi Rao and Sarah Aboobaker. Vaidehi's women-oriented writings are practices in the exploration, evaluation and comprehension of the gendered woman and her interaction with the various power centres that seek to claim her. Her works include three collections of short stories—*Mara Gida Balli* (*Tree, Bush and Creeper*), *Antarangada Putagula* (*Pages from Deep Within*), and *Gola* (*Globe*)—an award-winning novel and a book of poems. In addition to these, she has translated two important feminist books from English into Kannada—Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's *Indian Women’s Struggle for Freedom* and Maitraiyee Mukhopadhyay's *Silver Shackles*.

The short story in Malayalam trails behind prose by at least two centuries, and has a history of over a hundred years. It is a history of "major aesthetic shifts and philosophic revolts (Satchidanandan, "Malayalam" 5). Structurally, it may have been influenced by the classical narrative structure of the West. However, the unmistakable imprint of local dialects, customs, folklores and other cultural contexts are evident in the themes and language employed. From the socially-focused and politically-conscious Progressive phase of the first decade of the twentieth century, the genre has morphed into a form that encompasses various disciplines like ecology and history, and ideologies such as feminism and decolonization, in an effort to understand and explore the various tensions, anxieties and tragic facets of lived contemporary reality. The range and variety of these stories defeat any attempt to classify them into hermetic categories in the present. Kerala’s Renaissance with its reformative agenda had forced the
women's question to the forefront in the early twentieth century. Gender and its interface with the political, social and imaginative spheres as a result partnered a strong tradition of women's writing in this era, of which Lalithambika Antharjanam and K. Saraswati Amma are representatives. Rajalakshmi's tragic stories in the mid 1960s were drawn from personal experiences as a woman and situations from her immediate surroundings. Writing in the 70s, Madhavikutty problematized women's issues without being overtly feminist. By highlighting female dilemma at the level of the unconscious through her enquiry into relationships between persons of either the same or different sexes as well as into sexuality and the notion of ideal love, she critically complemented and even transcended the divisiveness and frigidity of modernity. Sarah Joseph, whose contemporaries are Marasi, K.B. Sreedevi, M.D. Retnamma and P. Vatsala, was born in 1948.

The short story in Sarah Joseph's hands acquires the rhythms and resonances of poetry. By and large it displays a radical political edge with pronounced feminist tones derived from the author's ideological affiliations. As a social activist, she is the founder-member of "Manushi" a feminist organization, and is also credited with forming the first feminist theatre group in Kerala. Joseph admits that her initial stand on class as the source of gender oppression has eventually broadened to include the role of culture "in an effort to perceive the cause of women's problems in their entirety and not in parts" (Joseph, Interview 95). Her stories question patriarchal myths, subvert hegemonic values and record woman's and the subaltern's dissension with absolute principles and orders through the cadences of
fantasy as well as apocalyptic and prophetic visions. They are therefore
counter-cultural in intent. Joseph's short story collections include *Kadinte Sangeetham (Symphony of the Forest)*, *Manassil Thi Mathram (Only Fire in the Mind)*, *Snehathinte Niram (The Colour of Love)* and *Papathara (Ground of Sin)*. Her short story “Prakasiniyude Makkal” won the Katha Award in 1991. A recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award, she has also written several novels that have redefined the genre.

This thesis treats gender as critical in its conceptual and political design. For, it is in this domain that power contestations over knowledge structures, institutions, and systems that define and represent the concept of woman take place. By engaging situational constellations of ideologies in unconditional dialogue through discourse-forms, writings by women aspire to authoritative status at the very sites of their dissemination in textuality. The dilemma over the authenticity of aesthetics and politics presupposes an opposition between that which is inscribed in discourse and that which is "real." The fact that the politics of representation crucially intersects with the process of subjectification is of fundamental concern to women writers, and impels their need to delegitimize the identity of woman as an invention and expectation, historically regulated by the family, community and nation, by socio-cultural processes and religious precepts. Sarah Joseph, for instance, attempts to refigure women from the triviality of earlier depictions by men and portray them as "real" women (Joseph, Interview 99). Gendered aesthetics, both in the sense of women's perception and conception of the real, and the manner and mode of its expression in fiction is therefore directed towards bridging the gap between the imagined and the
experienced. Besides, the analysis the thesis proposes to undertake cannot but acknowledge a related component--of the opposition between the discursive and the material being a contentious issue between theoretical projects on the one hand and activist interventions in a lived world on the other. And to this end theoretical considerations relevant to the question of women's identity, whether in fiction or in the social, provide a clearer picture of the intent underlying the production and circulation of gender representations.

In order to obtain a comprehensive view of the dimensions--the nature, manner and effects--of the engagement of these literary texts with the political economy of gender in interpretations of the real, the thesis interrogates different aspects of textual production. A broad attempt has been made to do this in terms of the interaction of formal elements, ideological concourses and social processes. Needless to say, the selected texts are treated differently, each in their individual context. A brief account of the chapters which follow presents the gist of the thesis.

The second chapter attempts to contextualize the disparate structurings of female identities generated from within the nation. It analyses the asymmetrical "historical trajectories" crosscutting the Indian subcontinent, which have given rise to a multiplicity of subject-identities among both men and women (Sangari xxviii). These identities are problematic due to the temporal unevenness and regional segmentation in terms of which gender disjunctions, class factions, caste arrangements and religious insularity developed in India. The varying configurations of these
elements in specific or overlapping fields of ideological production experienced systemic disjunctures and concurrences that were crucial to the definition and circulation of cultural categories both within and between regions. This process also appropriated and refashioned into local terms the generalized or transnational ideologies intersecting it. Under distinct phases of political histories, these ideological ensembles shifted or crisscrossed, inducing complex responses across diverse cultural formations. Part of the effects can be discerned in the formulation of archetypal figures, institutions and orders of knowledge that promote and validate particular female identities. The systematic and expedient permutation of events in that case accentuated embedded knowledge forms and practices, and imposed certain types of subject-positions on women. In fact the several notions of femaleness circulating to this day were rendered possible only in the differentiae of selective historical moments. Women’s narratives mirror the exigencies of their age, their inscription in discourse problematizing gender as it translates from the experiential to the fictional realm. The qualitatively different levels of patriarchies and the narrative trajectories of intention additionally generate conflicts between discourses over the delineation of women. Literary constructs and ideologies even so did not always develop simultaneously; consequently there were extensive mutual appropriations or epistemic conflations. A related aspect tries to locate the relevant representations of women in the context of the changing requirements of the nation and historical forms of their respective times. Also implied here is the extent of the writer’s complicity and the interests at stake in sustaining or repudiating the conventional.
Much of the third chapter examines the space occupied by the state and the range of its intervention in different sites of gender politics in relation to the law. These sites are ideologically diffused and constitute women's economics that derive from the converging materialities of caste, ethnicity, religion, class and economy. If the formation of a legal culture under the nation-state is to be understood, the privileged referential status of patriarchies will have to be examined closely. For, the persistence and recurring reformulation of patriarchies find an affinitive “stabilizer” in the nation-state (Sangari xxii). At the same time, the nation as a consolidation of (post-)Enlightenment modernity has been the determinate arena of struggle for rights. The nineteenth-century reformist themes that represented reality through the lens of affective values played a crucial role in the establishment of legislations in India. Accordingly, these measures were compromised by a certain degree of loss in their logics of objectivity. The revisionist religio-cultural discourses directed towards reconstructing the resurgent social and political realms under colonial rule were mediated through the contention-ridden category of gender and the institution of the family. The concurrent shift in the relative location of these historical entities pertaining to positionality and identity, from the private to the public domain, paved the way both during the colonial period and in the future for the intervention of the state into the intimate spaces of the family influencing its gender differentiating productive activities, valuations, kinship groupings, sexualities and inheritance patterns. The extension of state authority into the familial complex however varies with ideologies of caste, religion, modes of governance, systems of gradation, occupations,
region, economic processes, and proximity to power and authority. Not only is patriarchy central to the state's accessibility to the domestic sphere, but it is paradoxically also a requisite for the effective implementation or maintenance of counteractive and corrective measures against hegemonic and subjugating schemes. For instance, underlying legal pronouncements upholding women's social or civil interests, or legislative amendments on discriminative and oppressive gendered policies is the tacit approval or forced consensus of a heavily compensated patriarchy.

As part of the enquiry, the chapter looks at relevant material and ideological systems that maintain women's oppression and repressed status, and preclude their participation as beneficiaries of legal entitlements in the public sphere--factors which compel a reconsideration of the gendered nature of citizenship. More specifically, the study unfolds a politics of gender segregation manifest as an inner-outer dyad corroborated by religio-spatial paradigms, the organization of the family, and the value-based principles of conjugality that comprise female knowledge enforced by the state-patriarchy nexus. The institutional role of marriage in perpetuating the sexual division of labour provides a fresh angle to the reform agendas of the early twentieth century. In such cases, any analysis of domestic labour and its symbolic transformations must take into account the combined effect of both state and family ideologies on familial economy. A gendered identity like widowhood, customary practices associated with paternity, and the psychological tyranny of legalized relations are offshoots of those forces mentioned above and bring to the fore the perpetuity of traditional prescripts and practices over legislative rulings endorsing
women's rights. Their juxtaposition moreover serve to highlight the discrepancies in theory and practice. One should consider the fact that the inconsistencies between state legislations and social reality also arise from a history of covert alignment between the pre-modern and a conservative modern deeply attracted to cohesive religious systems.

In the fourth chapter, the narrative strategies and techniques that foreclose the excluding and regulative effects of discourse come under close analysis. The text as discourse is a pattern of the historical moment in which it is constructed. Any attempt to circumvent its set frames of reference must take into account the heterogeneity of knowledge-complexes that converge on it. Strangely, this is not dissimilar to the manner in which the subject is constituted or the method its reorganization must follow. Conventional narrative modes are expedients designed to convey the ideology of patriarchy. The aesthetics that govern narratology under the circumstances lays down distinct rules of engagement and expression at the various levels of language, form, plot and genre. The female subject, already delimited on the axes of interpellation, consequently suffers further erosion of significance and is reduced to a silent index that inevitably invokes the patriarchal as the final referent. Only a radical reformation of these narratological elements as they interface with discourse at the juncture of representational politics, will bring about changes in the construct of the subject. In alternative histories and politics, submerged traditions and knowledge-orders, mediating practices rather than centres of influence, lie marginal and repressed desires, sexualities, intellects, identities and presences, not to mention the possibility of voicing dissent.
The revisory strategies these render necessary undertake the reframing of canonical texts, speech structures, narrative and generic forms, establish other logic systems, and re-examine institutionalized religious iconography and symbolisms. They attempt to recall archetypal figures, refashion cultural assumptions, and postulate alternative epistemological systems that will preclude an ahistoricist or essentialist view of women, and enable their subsequent historicization. Ultimately, the analysis seeks to evaluate the status of female subjection and subjectivity with the reformulation of women’s identities, while considering the articulation of possible solutions to the problems of determinate orders, systemic disparities and excluding ideologies in the wider context of the nation-state.

The fifth chapter proceeds from an examination of the mother-nation concept expressed in Bankim Chandra Chatterji’s novel Anandamath to the manifestations, configurations or modulations the discourse of motherhood assumes in narratives by women. The conflation of nationalism with sacredness in the nineteenth-century narrative directed the anxiety of male political impotency generated by colonial instrumentality into effecting the elision of female desire, and composed a rhetoric of maternal tradition that blurred the semantic distinction between servitude and privilege. Projected as female destiny, the value-based associations of maternity abstracted from the materialities of class, patriarchy and politics confounded any differentiation of the system from the “essence” of woman. It inevitably contained notions of self or identity, and the question of woman’s agency within socially-determined modes of individuation and collectivization. As part of the process of demythifying motherhood, this enquiry situates the
changing representations of the mother within their material contexts and also attempts to locate spaces of female agential possibility within a revised notion of the nation-state.

The sixth chapter investigates the representative status of women as writers, the significance of writing to these women, the gendered nature of their literary aesthetics, and its effect on their writings. Inscribed in discourse, the writer and the literary text are in their own distinct ways agents of ideology, produced in the arena of its desires and implicated in the transmission of its social significances. Writing and language as signifying practices of discourse are exercises in knowledge application and power, set up into specific patterns. Therefore, any effort at re-writing will need to discipline discourse as well as retrieve autonomy from the hegemony of its ideological structures. Autonomy, of course, is a debatable term, the form and extent of self-expression having always-already been conditioned by the self’s location(s) both in the discursive and the material spheres. Narratives in the autobiographical mode or those with autobiographical resonances are of particular relevance here. The subject “I” who authors both the discourses of autobiographical and fictional narrative self-references constantly contends against the divisiveness and displacements generated by her multiple locations, in an attempt to maintain control over the text. This struggle over authorship that underlies the problematic relation of the writer to her writing shapes the gendered nature of her literary aesthetics which strives to counteract the appropriative and delimiting generic modes and expressive elements deemed masculinist in design. Further, the employment of intertextual and
interdiscursive linkages exploit the principle of cohesion between disparate texts or clusters of discourse. They aim to expand the compass of textual potentiality and application, so as to exceed contextual determinacy. The emphasis on textual performance involves the more aggressive design of registering the complex of self-identities, of questioning male-authored literary traditions and genealogies, and above all of exercising the restitutive and interventionary purpose of art. The analysis also takes a look at the artistic sovereignty of women’s writing with its demand for the recognition of a female literary continuum, so much so that this chapter provides critical insights into the constructedness of women as writers.

The first section of the concluding chapter looks at women’s engagement with the short story genre at the levels of technique, style and form. Considering the fact that the social production of the text is never without some kind of purpose, it is inevitable that the structural characteristics of the genre simultaneously undergo a radical revision in the process of evolving and framing an alternative female aesthetics and politics. The innovations attending such undertakings leaves its mark on the economics of the genre which critically intervenes in the formal constitution of the female subject. The second section goes one step further and traces the possibilities inscribed in writings by women. By doing so, it seeks to propound a feasible alternative to the referential status of absolute political philosophies in the construction of reality.

The choice of writers has been in part circumscribed by the fact that translations of regional literature into other (regional) languages, and even into English, if at all there have been any, are not easily available. A certain
market-based notion of popular demand and international recognition appear to be qualifying factors for translating literary works and point to a certain exclusivism.