CHAPTER - 4

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHARLES DICKENS AND WILKIE COLLINS

In this study on Dickens and Collins, both writers show a similar partiality to the study of crime, mystery and suspense in literature. Certain common traits in their fiction which reflect their social concerns can be traced in the unfolding of their narrative art, especially in the novels dealt with in this study. The Victorian society, with its legal and criminal loopholes forms the background for their common concerns. Their subject of interest was the life of the Victorian middle class, with its trials and tribulations. The changing trends in the social set up were faithfully represented in their depiction of the psyche of the Victorian criminal. Both pointed an accusing finger at the society responsible for the wide spread prevalence of violence and crime.

With the soaring popularity of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins there was a simultaneous trend of preference for detective novels. Improvements in the law and order situation coupled with specific prison reforms no longer bothered the conscious citizen about the criminal’s plight. The second reason was the increasing interest in the detective police and the way they solved the mysterious crimes.

This eclipse of the convict hero by the detective hero, ... in Bleak House, The Woman in White, The Moonstone or The Mystery of Edwin Drood.... exerted a remarkable influence upon the development of the detective novel in English.¹
Innovations:

Both writers, adept at writing novels in the serial form, were tuned in to the pulse of the public—the urge for detective literature, which was marked by the element of mystery eventually explained, and the presence of criminals eventually punished. “Both men were ... satirizing social evils, attacking legal anomalies.... tales of mysterious crimes ... contrast between their respective methods of handling detective themes.” They mastered different techniques of writing these detective stories, Dickens developed an original technique free from external influences, whereas, Collins’s work showed a remarkable influence of Poe and some French sources. “Dickens’s interest in crime combined a visceral, boyish delight in villainy, and its uncovering with instinctive indignation in the face of an urgent social problem.” This is Edmund Wilson’s observation on Dickens’s *Bleak House*, where we come across the detective, Inspector Bucket. The detective element is skillfully merged into this social indictment. *Bleak House* owes its specialty to the introduction of a detective angle occupying an important part of the plot, with a different kind of victim (one having too many enemies) and the suspect, a most unlikely person. In it, we also have the first police detective hero with the added innovation of a clearing-up chapter. The other important innovation was the ‘husband-wife’ team. The latter innovation continued to be used sparingly, whereas, the first became a ‘must-have’.

Collins’s famous novel, *The Woman in White*, along with *The Moonstone* assured a new kind of literary status to the position of the detective
novel. Although sensational, the plot is never incredible, the mysterious angle puzzles, but retains the interest and importance of characterization, and the 'fair-play convention' is perfected. Collins's narratives not only concentrate in deepening the mystery, but also aim at solving it by collecting past evidences and impartially deducing from a host of shifting and contradictory material to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. J.B. Taylor in her In the Secret Theatre of Home, 1988 pronounces Collins as the 'father' of the detective novel, with The Moonstone installing itself as the first and greatest of all detective novels in English.

Thus, Dickens and Collins practised and perfected the detective story to its present state. New features and an innovative style helped consolidate the sway and popularity of these novels. Ruskin found traces of the 'modern novel' in both Dickens's and Collins's works. This 'modernity' is a reference to the unsettling feature, which characterizes sensation fiction. The new trend of detective fiction was 'anti-gothic'.

Henry James credited Wilkie Collins with the introduction into fiction of "those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries, that are at our own doors". Instead of narrating unheard of mysteries, Dickens and Collins specialized in the narration of mysteries in familiar places and situations, like the family cupboard and the welcoming country house, which ensures the reader's instant response, lulled as he is by the deceptive atmosphere. In certain details like the importance of plot over character, common everyday settings, events which are contrived, striking episodes, murder, forgery, fraud, theft, robbery, mistaken identity, abduction — sensation fiction paved the way for detective fiction. We
find, that having introduced the all-important trait of mystery in the most common place of surroundings, to shock the reader, Collins is able to lift himself from mundane sensation fiction, as we know it. For instance there were no digressions in his *The Moonstone*, which is perhaps the first ‘full-blown’ detective novel and the plot centres around the mystery in the person of Rachel Verinder. To these two most important contributions of Collins we may now add the narrative method chiselled to perfection by Collins. He set the trend, which was to become a key technique for subsequent writers of detective fiction.

The narrative method itself — a series of individual viewpoints — ensures that the reader is constantly denied objectivity: everything is filtered and modified by partiality, misjudgements, uncertainty, and fallibility in each witness and by the author’s controlling influence.5

*The Moonstone* was also the first of its kind, in its observance of what Dorothy Sayers called the ‘fair-play rule’, which stipulates that, no vital clue is withheld from the reader. Thus,

Detective stories are structured around absence and the initial disruption of order; the detecting consciousness selects signs, threads its way through labyrinths to follow clues, learns to crack codes, deciphers the shifting traces of the past, then presents that history as a reconstruction....6

The element of mystery which generates suspense is abundant in the novels included in this study. Mystery fiction, according to Michael Cox7 has
always been conservative in nature and as such, what fascinated the Victorian public in the time of Dickens and Collins, still continues to fascinate us. The puzzle to be solved, the unknown becoming known, still continues to enthrall us, in the web of its mystery. *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens revolves round the mysterious murder of Tulkinghorn. *Great Expectations* has a mysterious benefactor of the protagonist Pip, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* deals with the mysterious disappearance of the hero, Edwin Drood. In the same manner, Collins’s novels too are enmeshed with the element of mystery, at all levels. Laura Fairlie’s look alike, Anne Catherick, is the mysterious woman in white in Collins’s most famous, *The Woman in White*. In *No Name* Magadalen Vanstone’s pursuits border on the mysterious — she is a part of the illegitimacy of the Vanstone family — the secret of the book. Rachel Verinder, the heroine of *The Moonstone* is the mystery, in the novel by that name. A study of these novels, throw ample light on the element of mystery, which is responsible for creating suspense while reading these novels. Crime, mystery and suspense are the footholds on which these novels stand and Dickens and Collins exploited these themes to their fullest potential in the novels discussed above.

**Narrative Art:**

The most interesting part of Wilkie Collins’s career, according to critic, Harvey Peter Sucksmith, is that which shows his intimate association with Charles Dickens. When Dickens invited contributions to his *Household Words*, from other upcoming artists, none could shake off the mantle of the great writer. In trying to live up to his style they ended up imitating him. But the all-
important factor which won Collins, Dickens’s approval, was his protest to this imitation of another’s art. “... the method Collins is to find a central idea, the second to find the characters, the third to let the incidents bring themselves about from the nature of the characters, the fourth to begin the story at the beginning ...” (WW 591). Collins was an undoubted genius in the construction of a mystery plot, full of suspense. If Collins benefited much in the way of characterization and structure from Dickens, Dickens too had much to learn by way of mastering structure from Collins. Dickens’s later novels like Great Expectations and Edwin Drood are two such examples. They were both faced with the problem of weaving a distinctive narrative, which would suit both the serialization and publication of a book. Dickens praises Collins by writing a letter to say, “I have read this ... it is a very great advance on all your former writing ... in character it is excellent ... it grips the difficulties of the weekly portion ...” (WW 602). For instance, we have this episode where Hartright reads the epitaph on the supposedly dead Lady Clyde, to raise his eyes and find himself looking directly into Lady Glyde’s eyes standing next to him.

Although, both Collins and Dickens manipulated certain events in the plot, however they did not do so to manipulate sensation at all costs. Collins himself said that his efforts were always directed “to keep the story always advancing, without paying the smallest attention to the series division in parts, or to the book publication in parts” (WW xi). An instance of this control is where Marian Halcombe collapses while trying to record in her diary, the threat to Laura’s life, after overhearing Count Fosco and Percival Glyde, plotting against her, which is followed by the Count adding a postscript to her entry, in
the diary. But Collins by including the 'humdrum comedy' of Mr. Fairlie's hypochondriac observations achieves greatness as the Count's wickedness is contrasted with Mr. Fairlie's comedy. Dickens too understood the limitations of the serial form. In so doing, he gave more importance to the introduction of incident into each chapter and also ensured overall unity to the novel. Rather than a 'serial curtain' he strove for a curtain at the end of each chapter. He tried to infuse this curtain with suspense as in Bleak House, where Mr. Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock are left looking at and sizing up each other. So well did Dickens understand Collins's manner of writing and Collins Dickens's that once when Collins was taken ill before the completion of No Name, Dickens offered, "to come to London straight, and to your work. I am quite confident that, with your notes, and a few words of explanation, I could take it up at any time and do it ... so like you as that no one should find out the difference" (NN xv).

Wilkie Collins, on the other hand always made the plot more important than his characters, which "intricately woven, was rigorously adhered to and faithfully carried out, inevitably, from the first to the last page." Wilkie Collins believed that after Scott and Fennimore no writer was much bothered about telling stories. Novels were profusely produced, but the thrilling tales, especially those in which the plot was more thought of, or even as much as the dramatis personae, began to dwindle alarmingly. "I have always held that the primary object of a work of fiction should be to tell a tale, ...; but it is not possible to tell a story successfully without presenting characters; ..." Although Collins begins most of his narratives with the introduction of characters trying to decipher a number of clues, which will help them to solve
the mystery, in *No Name*, he reverses the pattern. The single most important secret is let out at the beginning itself and the interest is sought to be generated by the characters' follow-up of the clues leading to the mystery. Thus, we reinstate our belief in Collins that plot is more important as characterization automatically follows it. To ensure the success of a plot, characters created have to rise to it and the reader's interest is sustained for the simple fact, as Collins points out, that they too are men and women.

Dickens thus, appreciated and learnt much from Collins regarding plot construction. In his haste to introduce fresh characters of interest, he often overlooked their necessity to the plot and thus, digressed unnecessarily. In the delineation of characters we find Dickens uses grotesque characters to fill up a void in the narrative and to provide the much needed comic relief. Other than these all his characters belong basically to two types. People with sentiments and consideration towards others and people with none of these finer qualities whatsoever. But other than this peculiar trend, Dickens has been able to paint the picture of life with many beautiful and accurate specimens of the living. Pip, with all his boyhood fears and trepidations, which are later, replaced by the manly and greater expectations of love and money is a production of Dickens. John Jasper, with his split personality, who is painted in the darkest of colours, under the influence of opium but who later regrets his actions, is another of Dickens's masterpieces. That Dickens was deficient in plot construction is amply proved by the lack of story line in *Bleak House*. But this deficiency in plot construction, Dickens more than makes up for in his admirable *Great Expectations*. This perhaps was the book which Dickens produced after being
suitably influenced by Wilkie Collins. The plot of *Great Expectations* is better than any of his previous stories.

Excepting *Bleak House*, Dickens uses either the first person or omniscient narrative. This leaves ample opportunity to manipulate sympathy. The omniscient narrative especially, is more flexible than the first person narrative, in the induction of emotions, as it allows shifting to the different viewpoints of the characters easily. The first person on the other hand, achieves a more sympathetic viewpoint because of the cumulative effect. The advantage of using the first person narrative is obvious in the character of Pip, although in the delineation of Esther Summerson, it was not as effective. The narrative method used by Collins stresses on narrative fragmentation and puts an end to the predominance enjoyed by the narrative authority. The narrator of the realist novel is replaced by a group of narrators, (split or shared narrative), all of whom supply parts of the story and the narrator (the mating detective) gives them a detective reconstruction of the past. This is what Collins sets out to do in *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, where the detective by editing and sifting, takes over the role of narrator, whereas, in *No Name* we have an impersonal narrator trying to forge a link from the mass of fragmentary narrative. Although the detective is a part of the story being told, yet he takes over as the narrative authority. The reader is led to experience first hand, the thoughts, emotions and actions of the various characters, then there is a detour, when his knowledge and the detective’s merge to form a single perspective. Thus, the villain’s confession is effectively or successfully replaced by the detective reconstruction of past events.
Both Dickens and Collins made ample use of irony in their narrative, especially in the delineation of character. Mr. Fairlie in Collins's *The Woman in White* ironically reveals that he was an egocentric hypochondriac. A better example of the use of irony is Marian’s conception of the true nature of Count Fosco. She knows and suspects fat men to be capable of committing atrocious crimes, yet Collins ironically fore-shadows the truth about the Count. Marian in her diary records the true nature of the Count yet, Mr. Fairlie and Mrs. Michelson are still bowled over by the Count’s disarming smile and manners. Dickens too exhibits judicious use of irony in his language. *Great Expectations* is a masterpiece of a story and its ironic structure is reflected in the very figures of the language by which it progresses. Pip’s mistaken belief that Miss Havisham is his secret patron is mirrored in an image which is charged with structural irony: when she, makes her crutch stick play round Pip and refers to him as a ‘gay figure’, as if she, the fairy godmother who had changed Pip’s attitude was Pip’s unknown benefactor.

The irony becomes explicit upon a second reading and accounts for the extraordinary richness we find in Dickens’s narrative. When Pip expects the lawyer, Jaggers, to tell him at last who his patron is, an analogy recalls a previous incident in the story: “As I sat down, and he (Jaggers) preserved his attitude and bent his brows at his boots, I felt at a disadvantage, which reminded me of that old time when I had been put upon a tombstone” (GE 249). It was in fact Magwitch, the convict, Pip’s unknown benefactor, who had held him on the tombstone as a small boy and it was out of this incident that Magwitch’s decision to become Pip’s benefactor had arisen; but Jaggers does not reveal the
truth and the ironic effect is sustained. Dickens's progress as an artist showed his gradual preference for structural irony instead of verbal irony. In the process, the irony is more natural. The overlapping irony results in a richer interconnectedness, which is more subtle and searching. In *Great Expectations*, Pip's theft of food for the convict in the marshes, forms the base of the structural irony at work. Pip's fear of discovery is almost realised at the end of Chapter IV when he mistakenly thinks the Sergeant's handcuffs are meant for him. A fusion of dramatic irony with structural irony results when this entrance of the Sergeant coincides with Mrs. Gargery's discovery that the savoury pie is missing. What is ironical is that not only is the child's naivety made conspicuous, but it is compared and contrasted with the adult's naivety.

Both Collins and Dickens used melodramatic effects to their advantage in the novels. Normally melodrama is criticized because it sanctions external action in the absence of internal drama but in Collins's novels, the action is limited not only to the external, but ensures internal participation too. Both Anne and Laura's persecution and incarceration are situations, which are melodramatic. The aristocratic Laura and commoner Hartright as heroine and hero, is also a common melodramatic trait. The attraction and mistrust between Marian and Count Fosco is credible because of the expertise and patience and the moral and immoral tactics applied by both. Thus, where Collins humanizes Count Fosco, he never exonerates the Count's evil deeds. Melodrama is often condemned for its simplistic and rigid view of life. But although, Collins's subject is crime, and as Sucksmith\textsuperscript{11} points out crime is an everyday affair, but it is not so on a personal level. Collins takes pains not to confuse melodrama with
the demands of art. Dickens, especially in his later novels, stressed more on the dramatic rather than on the melodramatic or theatrical effects. Dickens’s vibrant imagination and keen observation blessed him with a wonderful felicity of invention. Dickens not only devised effective scenes but also combined a series of effective scenes into a harmonious whole. The wedding scene in *Great Expectations,* witnessed by Pip, twenty-five years later, stands out in the book. The rotten and putrid wedding feast shows the futility of love and hope, in the character of Miss Havisham, who is hell bent on dashing Pip’s hopes too.

Then from situation to sensation, Collins was a master of the sensation form so much so that he came to be regarded as the father of this genre. Dickens too came under Collins’s influence and thus comes under this category. *Great Expectations* is a sensation novel; complete with impossible incidents and strange, dangerous and exciting situations, but what possibly spoils the effect is perhaps Dickens’s introduction of unlikely characters. Somehow, the equation among Pip, Jaggers, Havisham and Estella doesn’t work out. Again, Joe is too kind and forgiving, Mrs. Joe’s fascination for Orlick borders on perversity and Miss Havisham’s plan of destruction is nothing short of an insane woman’s. On the other hand, Collins’s subject matter is sensational and violent, but because of the care taken in the introduction of life like characters, Collins succeeds, where Dickens fails. For instance in *The Woman in White,* Fosco dramatizes himself in his confession and then Marian and Hartright are ordinary, level-headed characters lending credulity to the plot. Coming to the element of drama in his novels, Collins himself was a keen participator in amateur drama and he formally declares his credo that “the Novel and the Play are twin sisters in the
family of Fiction ... the one is a drama narrated, as the other is a drama acted" (NN xii). In *No Name* Collins exploits this kinship between fiction and the drama. Disinherited and homeless, Magdalen exploits her acting abilities and, helped and cheated by Captain Wragge, she soon earns enough money from her ‘Entertainment’ to set about revenging the usurping Vanstones.

Another common narrative technique that these two had in common was the opening of the novel. Wilkie Collins in his *The Woman in White* never plunged into the middle of the story in medias res. He starts from the very beginning of the story and then puts in his characters around whom the different situations in the novel are contrived. *The Moonstone* too runs along the same lines. However, in *No Name* instead of the characters coming across vital clues to solve the mystery puzzling them, the most important secret, the illegitimacy of the Vanstone daughters is revealed right at the beginning. Dickens is not especially famous for the opening of a novel. Only the openings of *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations* and *Edwin Drood*, are slightly more satisfactory than most of his novels. “An ancient English Cathedral Tower ... Ten thousand scimitars.... Thrice ten thousand dancing girls ... vague period of drowsy laughter ...” (ED 21). The opening sets the ironic situation pervading throughout the novel, the respectable veneer of Christianity constantly vying for attention with oriental fantasies. *Bleak House* with its London fog and its repetition not only describes the hazy outlook on life by members of the society, but also the sordid and unhealthy affairs, which taint and embrace not only the evil, but also the good. The desolation of the boy-hero Pip in *Great Expectations* is also a case in point. The desolate marshes, the grey clothed
convict, the gibbet and hulks all remind one of the inherent criminality lurking beneath our civilized exteriors.

And then we come to the transmutation of fact, where several ideas are merged in forming a certain character. According to Harvey Peter Sucksmith, three separate ideas went into the making of Miss Havisham. Collins too was not far behind him in this. When Collins was trying to find a villain for his *The Woman in White*, he wanted to attribute some amount of novelty to his villain. Count Fosco exhibits many characteristics, none of which are English, but foreign. Collins himself says this of Count Fosco:

I thought the crime too ingenious for an English villain, so I pitched upon a foreigner.... after *The Woman in White* appeared I received a large number of letters.... accusing me of gross personal caricature or rather too accurate portraiture ... (WW 591-92)

A study of their respective narratives will find their limitations, without which we cannot conclude a critical work. Collins "asserted that it was the duty of the novelist to do more than amuse. This opinion was the cause of his worst fault. ..." In *The Woman in White* he wrote about the danger of mad-houses being in the hands of private people and in *No Name* against the law’s non-recognition of illegitimate children. So we find these two conscious and commendable artists socially very alert. So much so, that Dickens and Collins both suffer from this limitation to their art.
Common Themes:

Dickens and Collins had many similarities and dissimilarities as novelists of crime and mystery stories. The delineation of characters, events and devices employed by them likewise exhibited similarities and dissimilarities. To begin with the aspects immediately dealing with crime—the detective.

Dickens never presented a Police Officer in an unsympathetic light, .... But Collins, notwithstanding his notable Sergeant Cuff, showed no such general admiration for the police, ... in Who Killed Zebedee? ... completely fails to win the reader's respect, far less his admiration.14

Inspector Bucket of Bleak House and Sergeant Cuff of The Moonstone are two detectives who can be held up as examples of the way Dickens and Collins treated their detectives. In Bleak House, Inspector Bucket is impressive with an air of purposeful efficiency, mystery and authority quite in contradiction to his commonplace appearance. Having solved the murder mystery, he is confident of a willing audience. He is a man who commands respect and is able to take control as and when required. Compared to him, is Collins's detective by the name of Sergeant Cuff in The Moonstone who again is a man very much in control of the situation. Collins adds a few distinguishing features. Cuff was methodical and meticulous more than being brilliant. After an initially intelligent breakthrough, regarding the time of the diamonds' theft, he is absent for most part of the novel, until he appears at the end with a detective reconstruction of the mystery of the stolen diamond. All the same, Bucket is to be more admired if we are to accept Anthea Trodd's view in the Introduction to
The Moonstone. "... he (Sergeant Cuff) lacks the social deference of Inspector Bucket in Bleak House. He also lacks Bucket's charisma, interest in disguise, and aesthetic pleasure in crime and detection" (TMS xiv).

Then we have certain differences in the structuring of these detective novels by Dickens and Collins. In Bleak House the detective story was made an important part of the plot; with a special type of victim and the reader kept in suspense as to the motive as well as the identity of the murderer; which gave English fiction its first police detective — hero and introduced the device of a 'clearing-up chapter'. In The Woman in White and The Moonstone Wilkie Collins gave a new literary dignity to the detective novel. The plot in each of them is sensational but never incredible; the puzzle theme, exciting mystery and suspense, however, does not eclipse the human characters in interest or importance; and in so doing, Collins devised and presented 'the fair-play convention' which has such far-reaching effects. The husband-wife team of Inspector Bucket and his wife in Bleak House are complemented by the duo of Count Fosco and his wife in Collins's The Woman in White. But, where, Dickens uses this team in solving the mystery for a good cause, Collins uses the pair to complicate the mystery in The Woman in White.

One detail, which stands out in a study of these novels, is the democratic attitude to domestic servants, to almost seem revolutionary in Victorian times. To Collins, even more than Dickens, the social critic, a servant was not a being to be ridiculed or unnecessarily neglected, but a normal human being with a real heart and mind, and should be given the benefit of doubt. It is to the credit of detective fiction that it takes the same democratic standpoint, impartially
judging statements made by master and mistress or by the farm labourer and char woman. Collins, moreover, does not mock or criticize the active spinster as Dickens, Thackeray and even George Eliot sometimes take relish in. Marian Halcombe is the triumph of Collins’s *The Womam in White*. She remains a spinster, sacrificing her love for Hartright and ensures that he and her sister enjoy a happy married life. Even the deceitful Count Fosco, cannot help but admire the manly Marian because of the many qualities of her head. In contrasting the picture of Marian with Dickens’s Miss Havisham, we find that in spite of having had a raw deal in life, she does not excite any feelings of pity in us. And when even Estella has no feelings for her, we cannot help but feel that she richly deserves her dues.

The recurrent theme in both Dickens’s and Collins’s novels is that of society as the precursor of all evil. Magwitch in *Great Expectations* has been shunned by society and he desperately tries to regain his position by projecting something of his own in the figure of Pip. In the same way, Magdalen Vanstone of *No Name* because of the laws formed by society, becomes an illegitimate child on the death of her parents. This same theme of illegitimacy is also found in Dickens’s *Bleak House*, where Esther Summerson is an illegitimate child. This is also reflected in Collins’s *The Woman in White*, where the uncanny resemblance of Anne Catherick to Laura Fairlie, forebodes ill for the latter. Again, Sir Percival Glyde, to attain a place of social standing tries to become a legitimate child by tampering with the church records.

Then we have betrothed couples and couples who marry because of the lure of the lucre and also for love. In *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, we have
Edwin Drood himself and Rosa Bud, affianced to each other. In The Woman in White, Sir Percival Glyde and Laura Fairlie are engaged to be married. In The Moonstone Rachel Verinder and Franklin Blake fall in love and decide to get married. In Bleak House, Ada and Richard begin to like each other and become engaged. Then there are other set type of characters resembling the melodramatic villain and the hero of lowly birth aspiring towards the gentle lady. In Dickens’s Great Expectations we have Pip and Compeyson aspiring towards Estella and Miss Havisham respectively, both of superior social standing to them. In The Mystery of Edwin Drood both Neville Landless and John Jasper look up to Rosa Bud with love and lust, respectively.

We find autobiographical traces in the works of both these famous novelists. Charles Dickens could easily identify himself with the unlived young Pip in his childhood, in Great Expectations. Later when he grows up to love Estella and is repeatedly spurned by her, it has definite traces of his affair with Ellen Ternan and his tempestuous relationship with her. In Bleak House Dickens used his first hand experience as a parliamentary reporter. Again, Mr. Jasper is, like Dickens, an artist and a musician. He smokes opium, and so, like Dickens, leads a life of the imagination apart from his normal life. Collins’s male lead in his The Moonstone, commits a theft under the influence of laudanum and at the time of his writing The Moonstone, Collins was regularly taking laudanum to relieve his pain. The Woman in White’s vision of the woman dressed in white was actually Collins’s experience and real life meeting with Caroline Graves who later became his mistress.
And then we come to the last, but not the least comparison between Dickens's and Collins's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and *The Moonstone* respectively. In Collins's *The Moonstone* “The linchpin of the social and psychic significance of mesmerism is Jennings himself... he uses opium to stir up Blake's past...”¹⁵ In the same way, John Jasper under the influence of opium re-enacts the murder of Edwin Drood and says, “What I told you so. When it comes to be real at last, it is so short that it seems unreal for the first time”(ED 292). He has strange mesmeric powers and a remarkable gift of rehearsing in his visions, before and after the event, the crime, which we are given to understand, he has committed. As in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*, the mystery is obviously going to be explained by the principal actor in a trance. Then, there is this theory forwarded by Mr. Duffield¹⁶ which says that Jasper was a member of the Indian sect of Thugs and he commits the murder, keeping in mind their rituals and customs. In the same way, in *The Moonstone* Collins makes use of the occult and the oriental. The Indian Brahmins practice clairvoyance and use mesmeric powers to try and find the whereabouts of *The Moonstone*.

Vision and Art:

Harvey Peter Sucksmith¹⁷, had rightly remarked that Collins gave a different angle to the treatment of crime in his novels. No doubt, crimes happen everyday, but then no other writer has dwelt with crime on the personal sphere by making it an everyday personal experience. The protagonist and other characters make us feel the intensity of the crime, by their very personal
involvement in it. Dickens, too has dealt with crime in the same manner. Having exhausted the element of the rebel in his social novels, the rebel cut off from the society, Dickens pursues the institution of crime in his novels. Crime in all its aspects, personal, social and organized, finds its way into Dickens’s novels and its logical conclusion in his much talked about *Edwin Drood*. Both Dickens and Collins were very much involved with the social rules and regulations of their times. Dickens always took pains to present the moralist’s view in his novels, possibly to redeem mankind. Collins’s novels too dealt with the aspects of morality and respectability in Victorian life. “... even when its final inclination was to uphold conventional morality, the sensation novel also probed and questioned Victorian moral and social orthodoxies.” From the social, we come to the legal aspects of Dickens’s and Collins’s novels. A few excerpts from their novels, will give us a clear picture of how effective they thought the law was.

“Dickens makes clear that the court of Chancery is a mere charade of justice.... The lawyers ... are ‘players’ in costume, ‘making a pretence of equity with serious faces’ ...” In Collins’s *No Name* Mr. Pendril the lawyer remarks: “I am far from defending the law of England, as it affects illegitimate offspring. On the contrary I think it a disgrace to the nation” (NN ix). In *The Woman in White*, Hartright is Collins’s spokesman, when he finds out that, “The law is still ... the pre engaged servant of the long purse” (WW 1).

So, we see whatever differences Dickens and Collins might have shown in the treatment of crime, mystery and suspense in the novels studied above, their theme was the same. There were many similarities and differences in their narrative art. In the ‘study of their fiction’ we find familiar characters, dealt
with similarly and differently by them. But in terms of society and the law and its relation to crime, they seem to have shared the same convictions. That society is the begetter of evil and the law, which seeks to protect the innocent and the guilty alike, is in fact, equipped to protect none without adequate financial aid.
Notes:


7. See, Cox, Michael. *Victorian Detective Stories*.


10. ______. *Victorian Novelists*, 127.


