INTRODUCTION

The Victorian society was fraught with changes in all spheres. Society, politics, economics were all subject to the impact of gradual but definite changes. The Industrial Revolution, was, the impetus for all these changes. Politically, the fabric of English society underwent a great change. Personal liberty of the Anglo Saxons came to be replaced by democracy and individual freedom. The House of Commons made allowances for the real power to be vested in the hands of elected representatives. The Theory of Divinity of Kings was declared extinct. This helped in the spread of democracy and popular education, which set the stage for religious tolerance and growing brotherhood. But the impact of the Industrial Revolution changed all this. The economy which showed a rising trend reflected a society, which was fraught with conflicting forces.

The change in the pattern of production, divided the society into the rich, the middle class and the very poor. Various social measures like the Reform Act of 1832 failed to realize the dreams of the poor. Friedrich Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, in 1844, probed this question of social classification. The book is a vivid portrayal of the evils which followed the Industrial Revolution. Engels depicts the beginning of the 'Town-ward drift' – the gradual influx of the rural population to the industries located in the urban areas. This migration did not have the desired impact on the lives of the rural people. They came to be the English proletariat, living and working in inhumane conditions. This class of English people was completely isolated and
desolate. This gradual discontentment led to a rising incidence of the crime rate. This deepening focus on the privileged and the under privileged is best illustrated and analysed in the literary scene of Victorian England. Dickens and Collins were two such writers who adequately represented the turmoil in Victorian society. Their works served as a guide to the confusing standards and values which were upheld as truths and counter truths.

For a basic introduction to Dickens and his partiality to crime and detection in his novels, Philip Collins’s, *Dickens and Crime*, 1962 is perhaps the first full length study that critically analyses Dickens and his depiction of crime. The book is especially helpful for its exhaustive material not only on Dickens, but also for its insight into Victorian society. Other books which I have found particularly helpful and informative are Peter Owens’s, *The Development of the Detective Novel*, 1958, Ian Ousby’s, *Bloodhounds of Heaven: the Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle*, 1976, and Julian Symons’s *Crime and Detection; An illustrated history from 1840*, 1966. Alongwith a history of the development of the detective novel, its popularity and peculiarities, what is especially striking are the comparisons among the different writers influenced by and writing on crime and detection.

Dickens and Collins have found mention in all three books, their field of interest being the same. They shared a very rewarding relationship, personally and professionally. They went together on trips abroad and at home influenced each other professionally. Dickens learnt a thing or two regarding plot construction from Collins. On the other hand, Collins, taking care not to imitate the great master, improved his delineation of characters. Two other books worth
mentioning are Harvey Peter Sucksmith's, *The Narrative Art of Charles Dickens: The Rhetoric of Sympathy and Irony in his Novels*, 1970 and Jenny Bourne Taylor's, *In The Secret Theatre of Homer: Wilkie Collins, sensation narrative and nineteenth-century psychology*, 1988. These books deal extensively with the subtleties and nuances of Dickens's and Collins's narrative art, respectively. Their appeal lay in the manipulative literary forms which depended on the writer's ingenuity in concocting riddles and mysteries.

The examination or analysis of the criminal, its relation to the trends in Victorian literature, was an important fact of life and it enters this work as an intrinsic part of the social structure of Dickens's and Collins's novels. The depiction of the criminal and the question of mystery becomes a fundamental concern of the novelist and one feels that this element is vital to the complexities that the novel examines in relation to its depiction of life. The underworld serves as a mode of existence serving its dual motive of the examination of good and evil as well as a reference to the timeless appeal of a well structured detective tale. It therefore essentializes and focuses on both the quality and mode of narrative in its analysis of a world that serves to highlight one very important structure of the Victorian society — the criminal. Crime, mystery and suspense are used to create a world of make-believe, but it also serves to show the significance of those qualities in a world which is disturbingly familiar. Worlds are created only to be destroyed. The detective is the master creator, like the novelist himself, he makes only in order to unravel the mysteries of existence. Thus, this process of creation and destruction of mystery forms a very important aspect of this study. In mastering the art of
detection, the works of these two writers were popular not only because of the literal aspects of their tales, but also because of the way they employed their visions to portray man in society.

This thesis consists of five chapters. The Preface and Introduction precede these and the Conclusion follows them. Chapter 1 is a broad and general survey of the Victorian society inhabited by Dickens and Collins. The political, social and especially the economic life of the Victorians have been studied in brief. Mention has been made of the Industrial Revolution and how this indirectly changed the entire texture of the Victorian society. The rural population was gradually displaced from their home and hearth, and was at the same time denied a place in the fast developing industrial towns. This aspect of study then gradually unravels the criminal scenario as a natural fallout of the abject state of poverty of the English proletariat. The chapter also tries to throw insight on the reasons for the popularity of the detective novel and why Dickens and Collins preferred this form to others. Chapter 2 is a detailed study of William Wilkie Collins's three well known novels. They are *The Woman in White*, 1860, *No Name*, 1862 and *The Moonstone*, 1868. Stress has been laid on his use of the elements of crime, mystery and suspense to manipulate the narrative. His mastery of plot construction is equalled by his astute projection of characters, especially the women, considering the fact that he himself was a man. Chapter 3 is a detailed study of three of Dickens's more well known novels. They are *Bleak House*, 1853, *Great Expectations*, 1861, and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 1870. Always famous for his art of characterization, this chapter throws light on Dickens's ability at plot construction. Chapter 4 is a
comparative study of the narrative art of Dickens and Collins. The detective
story has been used by them to project their vision and art. Crime, mystery and
suspense are common elements and along with many similarities, they also had
their dissimilarities. Especially worth mentioning, is the influence each had on
the other. The last chapter, that is, Chapter 5 is a comparison of Dickens and
Collins with some contemporaries, showing similar characteristics in their
handling of the detective story. They too have used the same elements, but with
subtle differences in the mode of narration and the importance given to plot and
classification. There seems to be a difference of opinion regarding the
importance to be given to plot construction and characters. The writers studied
in this chapter are Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Anthony Trollope
and Arthur Conan Doyle.

Thus, crime, mystery and suspense are the techniques used to unravel
the psychology of the criminal not only because of its fictional popularity, but
also as a means of dwelling on man and his nature. This element of the criminal
helps in adhering to the popular fiction of the time and also helps to unravel the
psychological make up of man. Using this technique, the writers dwelt endlessly
on the human psyche - the conscience, where the forces of good and evil battle
with each other for conquest of the human soul. Thus, was the criminal
portrayed – the criminal who was an important part of the Victorian
underworld, through the elements of an ordinary detective story. In this survey
of the Victorian world, in its impulse and creation, we find the social tensions
creating a hiatus between realism and populist trends creating fiction that serves
to delve into the psychological disadvantages of a depraved environment. This
underworld of Victorian crime finds and recreates a world of mystery and suspense. So, it is not surprising that the Victorian novel very often rests between this clash of good and evil. That this theme has been noticed by the major approaches to the Victorian novel has very often been discussed, but this particular study seeks to highlight this survey by offering a comparison of two major contemporary writers – Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. Secondly, in relation to a study of these elements in their work, a relation to the link between popular and serious literature serves to reflect the need to analyse popular works of Dickens and Collins as they incorporate many of the contemporary tastes of the Victorian suspense story.

Thus, the study attempts to explore this vital link between the Victorian scene and the genre of the detective story, its origin and development. From a broad survey of the social background of the Victorian novel, the study then narrows down to a comparison between Dickens and Collins. This study therefore tries to understand the vital forces that entered and reshaped the imagination of Dickens and Collins, particularly its emphasis on the development of the criminal personality in fiction. Thus, the human psyche and the environment seem to be the controlling medium in our understanding and appreciation of a major theme in Victorian fiction. Therefore, this aspect needs a full length study as little work has been done to relate the works of these two contemporaries as part of our attempts to find reasons why the focus of both these writers dwell on the criminal and the underworld of Victorian society. Upheaval and reversal form a major theme in both these writers and as part of their thematic structure it is interesting to analyse this as part of a recurrent
pattern which needs further study. Reversal, change and conflict are at the core of a renewal of faith by both Dickens and Collins and it would indeed be worthwhile to probe into this aspect of their art and vision of life which leads to a re-structuring of experience in their novels.