WOMEN'S SUBJECTIVITY, MODERNITY AND CONJUGALITY: HISTORICISING POPULAR WOMEN'S WRITING IN KANNADA, 1950s-1980s

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Declaration

I, P. Radhika, do hereby declare that this thesis entitled **Women's Subjectivity, Modernity and Conjugality: Historicising Popular Women's Writing in Kannada, 1950s-1980s** contains original research work done by me in fulfillment of the requirements for my PhD Degree in Cultural Studies from the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society and that this report has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma in this or any other institution. This work has not been sent anywhere for publication or presentation purpose.

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Certificate

Certified that this thesis entitled **Women's Subjectivity, Modernity and Conjugality: Historicising Popular Women's Writing in Kannada, 1950s-1980s** is a record of bonafide study and research carried out by Ms. P.Radhika under my supervision and guidance. The report has not been submitted by her for any award of degree or diploma in this or in any other university.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Journeying Concepts, Journeying through Concepts

> She does not have the time to read the daily newspaper to know what is going on around the world; she doesn't have the patience in the first place. Consequently her knowledge about the world is very limited. Rarely, if she finds some leisure, her habit is to pick up a stupid story or novel.
>
> Anupama Niranjana, in *Manini* (Self-Respecting Woman), 1986, 123.[1]

The above quote is not a criticism of women reading popular women's fiction made by a mainstream literary critic. It would not be surprising if that were the case. It is a comment made by one of the women writers, both a novelist and advice writer, whom I discuss in the thesis. The comment appears in one of the writer's later works. The reference to the 'stupid story or novel' could well have been to one of her own novels that she had produced in her earlier phase of writing. When the writer wrote the above lines, she had claimed a feminist identification. Despite being aware of the shift in her stance, I was shaken when I first came upon the remark. Clearly, Anupama Niranjana perceived her earlier novels as 'regressive' and 'reinforcing patriarchy'. These novels, which are

[1] All translations in the thesis are mine. While translating I have tried to retain the sense of Kannada. In transliterating rather than following any rule, I have drawn on conventional usage when available. Otherwise I have spelled according to the pronunciation of the Kannada words.

among the central objects of my study, are a set of popular novels by women writers in Kannada that were written in the 1950s-60s.

The key question for me was: is there a way of reading popular women's novels differently without adopting either a mainstream critical stance or a simplistic feminist stance that prejudges them as 'stupid' or 'trivial'? This is important because these novels, along with the women's advice books in Kannada, had a huge readership, a significant part of which was female. While speaking to one of my respondents who used to extensively read the women's novels, her husband constantly intervened to say that she used to be 'crazy' about these novels. He recollected that, finding her, with a book every evening when he came home from work, especially during their early years of marriage, he used to get so angry that he wanted her to stop the habit of reading itself (Hublikar 2004). Apart from their popularity, these novels were very influential in fashioning a notion of a 'self' for young women of the 1960s. Some of my respondents stated that the novels shaped their perceptions of how to dress and behave and taught them the need to better oneself (Veena 2003; Papanna 2004). I needed to understand what constituted not merely the popularity of these novels but also the manner in which they shaped a woman's subjectivity. This is the question that I also ask of the advice books written by women, which started coming out in the 1950s and became a popular genre of books in the 1970s.

A significant body of Kannada novels and advice books that were published between the 1950s and 1970s shaped women's subjectivity within the

context of conjugality. That is, the texts represented the woman as a *grihini* or 'married woman'. Here we need to understand the notion of *grihini* not only as 'wife' but also as 'mother' and 'daughter-in-law'. The questions raised were about how ideas of education, employment and sexual desire of the woman would affect her *dharma* (ethics/morals/duties) as a married woman, largely the ideals of *pativratya* (loyalty to the husband) and *sheela* (sexual purity). Though the questions raised about *dampatya* or conjugality in relation to claims of education and employment might not be entirely new, the manner in which these claims reformulate *dharma* departs from earlier invocations. As I will argue in the chapters later, the reformulation does not posit a new normative *dharma* but destabilises the *dharma-adharma* binary that is manifest in the early 20th century writings of women such as Kalyanamma and Thirumlamba. Among the novels, I focus on the specific genre of the romance novel where the narrative's primary movement is towards couple formation or marriage and its main focus is the delineation of romance. What is striking about the mid-century women's romances is the deviation from the romance narrative and their focus on conjugality. That is, in these novels couple formation occurs at the beginning or middle of the novel and the novel focusses on the relationship between the couple. The advice books, which were addressed to women, ranged from topics of child-care, post-natal care to sex-education for young girls. However, there was a focus on conjugality and the woman as 'wife'. The books constructed the conjugal space within a scientific frame and shaped the 'self' of the housewife in relation to questions of education, employment and sexual pleasure.

I study the novels and advice books in relation to the production of a modernity in the context of Karnataka, what I refer to in the thesis as a Kannada modernity. I see a Kannada modernity as being inaugurated in relation to notions of conjugality in the colonial period with new conceptions of conjugality emerging in Kannada popular print of the time (Galaganatha 1912; *Mahilasakhi* 1917a; 1918). These include notions of conjugality as comprised by love and companionship and emphasise the importance of the consent of the man and the woman in choosing his or her partner. Within the genre of the romance novel (*ramya kathana*), these perceptions get narrativised through the romance narrative that primarily moves towards couple formation after the passage through romance or courtship (Padikkal 2001, 47-48 and 62-64). In the genre of advice books, these notions were produced within a language of scientific reason. In the context of the 1950s, I read the novels and advice books in relation to the language of modernity that is produced by the Karnataka state or the then Mysore state.

Research Problem

In this project I attempt to map the formation of a Kannada modernity in specific relation to the fashioning of women's subjectivity[2] in the conjugal space. In particular I refer to the fashioning of the notion of a *grihini* (married woman)

[2] The term 'subjectivity' draws on an understanding of the subject broadly within the post-Saussurean or post-structuralist frame where the 'self' is seen as constituted in and through language or discourse. As is well known by now, post-structuralists such as Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault move away from the Cartesian framing of the self where the notion of the 'individual' was located in 'consciousness', exemplified in the famous phrase, "I think, therefore I am". The individual within the Cartesian frame was conceived as the origin of meaning and as a

within the space of *dampatya* (conjugality) in an important set of Kannada novels and advice books, written by women, that were published between the early 1950s and early 1980s.

The post 1950s women's writings were widely circulated and read due to the introduction of paperback publications, especially the publication of pocket books (*kai hothige*),[3] and the low cost of periodicals,[4] which were landmarks in the history of printing and publishing. This was accompanied by the establishment of private circulating libraries during the 1960s. These libraries flourished even in small towns of Karnataka and lent books at the rate of one anna a day.[5]

I examine the narrativising of conjugality in the romance novels of M. K. Indira (1917-1994), Vani (1917-1988), Triveni (1928-1963) and Anupama Niranjana (1934-1991) who began writing in the 1950s-60s.[6] In the thesis I refer to them as 'women novelists of the 1950s-60s' and 'mid-century women novelists'. Since, they were the second generation of women novelists in Kannada, following writers like Thirumalamba and Kalyanamma who wrote in

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being existing prior to language, as also the origin of resistance to oppression, which is the Marxian notion.

I also use subjectivity to raise the question of identity in relation to the subject, where the notion of subjectivity is placed between conscious agency and passive subjection. I discuss later in the chapter how I understand the notion of subjectivity as identity in relation to the question of modernity.

[3] Vahini publications, which was the first to publish pocket books, was established in 1953.

[4] The periodical *Prajamata* was being published in the 1950s was priced at 50 paise (half a rupee) for 24 pages. *Sudha*, which brought out its first issue of 80 pages in 1965 was priced at 40 paise and became an important competitor to *Prajamata*.

[5] For more details see Chapter 2, note 1.

[6] I use the first names or pen names of these writers in the rest of the thesis, as is commonly done in both academic and popular discourse in Karnataka.

the early twentieth century, I also speak about them as 'second-generation women novelists'. I would like to briefly introduce the women novelists and advice writers I focus on in the thesis. They were middle class and except Anupama, brahmin. However, Anupama was part of a growing Sanskritised middle class. The writers were well educated, apart from Indira who studied only till the third standard. Unlike Triveni or Vani who did not belong to particularly noteworthy families, Indira and Anupama did. Indira came from a rich zamindar family from Shimoga, South Karnataka. Her brother, T. S. Ramachandra Rao was the noted editor of the Kannada daily newspaper *Prajavani*. Anupama was a doctor and wife of a renowned writer, Niranjana. She belonged to the Devanga or weavers' community and married out of her caste, which was revolutionary for her time. She was part of the communist mileu of which her husband was an important member and had socialist leanings herself. She explicitly identified herself as a feminist in the 1970s, with the emergence of the women's movement in India. Irrespective of the differences among the writers, they represent those who would be characterised in the nation's history as 'exemplary citizens of an independent India'.

The trend of women writing popular fiction was started by Triveni who published twenty-one novels and three short stories between 1953 and 1963. Though Vani had started writing in 1944, initially she had problems with publishers returning her manuscripts[7] but later she too became popular and continued to write in periodicals. Two other important writers were M. K. Indira

[7] *Chinnada Panjara* was her first novel, which was published much later (Niranjana 1990, 69-70)

who started publishing by 1963 and Anupama Niranjana who entered the writing profession in 1952 and whose first novel was published in 1954. Interestingly, all these writers lived in the regions of Bangalore and Mysore during the years of their writing. Unlike male writers of the period, whose fiction was set in rural locations, except for some of the novels of Vani and Indira, the women's novels were situated in urban settings. Thus, the women's novels were significant in the production of urban subjectivities.

In the thesis, I compare the 1950s-60s women's romances with the popular women's romances that came out during the 1970s-80s. I suggest that the narrative of conjugality in the former splits into two sets of narratives in the 1970s women's romance novels, the first reverting back to the romance narrative of couple formation and the second continuing with the focus on conjugality. The two sets of narratives are represented in the novels of Usha Navarathnaram and Saisuthe (1970s-2000) and the later novels of Anupama Niranjana and of H. V. Savithramma respectively.

I study the advice books written by women that began coming out in the 1970s, specifically that of Anupama Niranjana (1970s-80s) who was the best known among these writers. Anupama was only twenty-three years old and studying in the medical college at Mysore when she was approached by M. B. Singh, the then editor of the daily *Prajavani*, to start a medical column for the Sunday supplement of the newspaper (Niranjana 1990, 56). Anupama's advice books such as *Vadhuvige Kivimaathu* (Advice to the Bride, 1971) and *Dampatya*

Deepike (Conjugality Manual, 1973), which addressed women, fashioned a new notion of the *grihini*. These books were extremely popular and have continued to be re-printed even to this day (*Dampatya Deepike*'s twenty-seventh edition was published in the year 2002). I will also explore in the thesis how the formation of women's subjectivity in the 1950s-80s writings was different from earlier and contemporaneous writings in Kannada, by men and women.

Conceptual Framings

I discuss in the rest of the chapter some of the key concepts that frame the thesis: conjugality, modernity and subjectivity and their relationship to women's writing. I journey through the concepts in order to arrive at my delineation of the research problem at hand and how I propose to address it. These concepts have emerged through a reading of the women's novels and advice writings. I understand the relevance of the material in tracing the significations of these concepts in a post-colonial context such as India. They pose questions to existing theoretical and conceptual frameworks especially in the disciplines of feminist studies and literary studies. I begin each section below with a brief outline of what I propose to do in order to help the reader understand the drift of my argument.

Conjugality

In this section, I explore the notion of conjugality through a reading of feminist interventions on the same. For this purpose I examine some of the

dominant analyses of both marriage and conjugality by Indian feminist scholars. I point to existing impasses in feminist theorising in India that have come about with the linking of marriage with tradition and with patriarchy. I show how this particular triad has come about firstly in the effort to counter nationalist idealisations of the domestic space as sanctimonious, and secondly through a replication of Western feminist theorisations, both in using their arguments about marriage practices in India that were made to point to the existence of patriarchy, and in mirroring their linking of marriage with the natural sphere and with patriarchy. This has led us, just like the Western feminists, to pose the question of women's agency only outside of the conjugal space. I suggest that we need to think of a non-Western critique, however not through locating women's agency within the conjugal space and within tradition (Kishwar 1999a; 1999b) or through locating conjugality itself in an Indian tradition that is posed in opposition to a Western modernity (Kakar 1989). We need to understand conjugality as a 'modern' concept that emerged with colonialism. What constitutes the non-Western nature of the critique is in the tracing of these concepts and their different significations, which will show the trajectory of modernity in our context. The popular women's writing I examine represents one such site where these significations are visible.

Across the disciplines of history and the law, feminists have focussed on late nineteenth-early twentieth century India to suggest that it marked a period of rupture caused by colonialism in the organisation of marriage and conjugal practices (Uberoi 1996; Nair 1996a; 1996b; Sarkar 2001; Gupta 2001). One of the

central contributions of these feminist interventions has been to make the link between nationalism and productions of the ideal woman as the 'domestic woman' or the 'woman at home'.[8] Within this understanding the woman is seen as the bearer of tradition and possessing moral values of *pativratya* (loyalty to the husband) and of *sheela* (sexual purity). This association of woman and tradition has been seen as foundational in the structuring of patriarchal discourses even in contemporary India. This has led to a representation of the discourse of marriage as embodying a 'tradition' oppressive to women, a tradition outside of which women's agency needs to be sought.

[8] Tanika Sarkar points to how conjugality was tied to the nationalist discourse in the beginnings of the nineteenth century before nationalism shifted its terrain onto the image of the mother-son relationship towards the end of the nineteenth century. Arguing against studies that locate the beginnings of Bengali nationalism in the public-political sphere, she locates it in the politics of the home. She argues that nationalists tried to show their moral superiority by making an analogy between a colonial relationship and the conjugal sphere that seemed to share a similar structure of power relationship. They argued that the latter, however, did not share the relationship of absolutism and subordination that characterised the former. They suggested that notions of traditional marriage, such as infant marriage led to more compatibility than courtship leading to marriage; that the Hindu family gives security to women; that women are not seen as mere producers of sons and that the Hindu marriage was a spiritual union through perfect love. However, between 1880 and 1900 some developments problematised the Hindu nationalist discourse on conjugality. Along with women who raised questions about the idealisation of the conjugal space in their writings, the reformist campaigns urged by the Rukhmabai and the Phulmani cases led to the nationalists having to replace their discourse of a romanticised conjugal space as benefiting and democratic to women with that of marriage as a customary injunction that women had to follow even at the risk of death. The Hindu nationalists added that this sacrifice marked the greatness of the Hindu woman. However, this framing of the conjugal space, which Sarkar says came close to a "prescriptive, loveless, disciplinary regime that is colonialism itself", could not last. It had to pave way for a new locus for nationalism which was now imaged in the mother-son relationship. So questions of "good women" that remained remarkably open and troubled upto the 1870s was replaced by far more rigid norms of femininity with the nationalist phase of the 1890s (Sarkar 2001).

Charu Gupta shows how in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century notions of marriage became more rigid and patriarchal within the context of nationalism. Not only was women's sexuality monitored, there was an intensification and redefinition of notions of *pativratya*. Arguments that were biological, essentialist and invoking social conditioning were put forward to talk about the difference between men and women. Consolidations of notions such as conjugality were aided by the spread of print that led to the formation of new patriarchies. She suggests that women, however, negotiated these notions in different ways (Gupta 2001).

Further, the autonomous women's movement in India that emerged in the 1970s-80s with a Left trajectory has emphasised the violence of marriage, having located marriage within the contours of 'tradition'.[9] It has attempted in its interventions to counter tradition in a context where a nationalist and statist discourse invokes tradition and marriage as sacred and as part of the essence of our culture (See, for instance, Palriwala and Agnihotri 1998).

Though I do not deny the importance of the feminist critique in countering the 'sanctity' and essentialist invocations of the conjugal space, I suggest that in an ironical fashion the feminist critique mirrors the nationalist and statist association of marriage with tradition, not giving enough thought to how marriage gets historically constituted. We need to re-think our critique of tradition taking into consideration the multiple significations of tradition in Indian history that are not necessarily essentialist.

Recent studies have cautioned us to ways by which our modes of reading are mediated by Western theory. This, the scholars suggest, has led to certain impasses in our theorisations and political interventions (John 1996; Prasad 1998b). One form of mediation has occurred in our replication of arguments made

[9] The Left's perception of tradition as 'backward' and hence something that has to be overcome or left behind largely arises from its modern and scientific framing of 'liberation' and 'progress'. This articulation finds most vocal expression in the popular science movements promoted by Left organizations that proposed the 'scientific temper' as against seemingly resistant attitudes to science among the 'masses' in India. This was, of course, a notion that turned around later among a rethinking Left attempting to move out of vanguardist impulses – the Subaltern Studies School, for instance. This rethinking has often involved the attempt to return to a cultural past that is imagined embodied in the 'mass' today.

within Western theory. Early feminist articulations in the West identified marriage as one of the important sites of patriarchy. Gayle Rubin's study, for instance, made this universalist argument by drawing on colonial ethnography and other studies that derive from colonial ethnography,[10] to talk about how kinship codes such as 'incest taboo' are organised to produce sex oppression in non-Western cultures (1975, 183).[11] Though there has been a shift in Indian scholars talking about marriage customs here, these very nodes of incest taboo and caste endogamy still continue to be present in talking about marriage as a patriarchal institution. For instance, Prem Chowdhry talks about the importance of "strict caste and sexual codes" in determining the status of a clan and caste group. At the centre of these codes, therefore, lies "the control of female sexuality, since its bestowal in marriage is so crucial to patriarchal forces, given their concern with caste purity, status, power and hierarchy" (1998, 333). She argues that caste codes include "traditional prohibitory taboos" that are not only inter-caste but also intra-caste such as the incest taboo of the *gotra* or lineage (ibid., 339-345).

The transposition of Western theory has also occurred in a different form where we have conceptualised certain problematics along similar lines. Mary John

[10] Rubin mentions that among the nineteenth century thinkers who attempted to write about the nature and history of human sexual systems, Lewis Henry Morgan wrote *Ancient Society* that inspired both Engel's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* and Levi Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. She mentions that the latter located the essence of kinship systems in the 'exchange between men and women' and constructed 'an implicit theory of sex oppression' (1975, 171).

[11] Rubin argues that incest taboo, obligatory heterosexuality and an asymmetric division of sexes organises human sexuality in different parts of the world. The asymmetry of gender that constructs the male as the exchanger and the female as the exchanged entails the constraint of female sexuality and determines the destiny of the woman within the codes of the specific kinship. In explicating one such code, she says, "it would be extraordinary for one of us to calmly assume that we would conventionally marry a mother's brother's daughter, or a father's sister's son. Yet there are groups in which such a marital future is taken for granted" (1975, 183).

argues that if the compulsion to counter the 'natural' or 'biological' identity of the woman has been central and sometimes poses an impasse for Western theorising, the need to counter culture or tradition acquires a similar centrality in feminist theorising in India (1996). If we look at the question of marriage this formulation holds true. In Carole Pateman's *Sexual Contract*, she argues that under the social contract though all individuals in civil society held the status of equal citizenship, since the conjugal sphere was relegated to the 'natural' order, questions of citizenship or 'civil' rights could not be brought up (1988). The compulsion for Western feminists was to interrogate the naturalness of the conjugal space to point to the constructedness of it—that is, the patriarchal constructedness. This particular framing of the conjugal sphere in Western feminist theory has led to the agency of the woman being posed outside of it. In a similar fashion, though not responding to an understanding of the conjugal space as the natural sphere but as the 'traditional' sphere, in India we too have continued to pose the question of feminist agency as outside of the conjugal space.

This feminist point-of-view has been dominant across the disciplines of sociology and literary studies. Some of these studies locate the 'agency' of the woman in the expression of female desire against a traditionally constraining conjugal space. Meenakshi Thapan's ethnographic study of middle and upper class women in intimate relationships in New Delhi is based on the premise that women experience 'mental torture' or 'mental violence' in such relationships (1997). Patricia Uberoi examines the iconic Hindi film *Sahib, Bibi aur Ghulam* (1962, Abrar Alvi) positing desire against *dharma* or duty to argue that the

transgressive sexuality of the wife is fated to meet a tragic end (1997). In literary analysis too, marriage, if not conjugality, which has been an important thematic concern, has been seen as a patriarchal institution, a constraint against which women's desire is posited (Vindhya 1998). These writers posit female agency as constrained by conjugality, agency sometimes being located outside of power relations. Such conceptualisations may underlie the compulsions of some feminists to seek agency in women occupying non-conjugal spaces, such as the devadasi, the sex worker or in recent discourse the lesbian (Oldenburg 1990; Natarajan 1997; Thadani 1996).[12]

Within this context, I raise the question of what it means to produce an alternative critique of marriage that interrogates this Western frame. Among attempts that specifically posit an Indian critique in opposition to a Western cultural-political critique are those represented by Sudhir Kakar, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Madhu Kishwar.

A dominant view in such studies is the positing of marriage in India as an institution embodying Indian culture or tradition in opposition to the modernity of the West. Sudhir Kakar, for instance, argues that conjugality is a space of intimacy and conflict governed by Hindu myths and concepts. He suggests that the idea of

[12] For Veena Oldenburg, the devadasi stands as a predecessor to the sex worker and even the lesbian and becomes a symbol of the 'agential' woman. Located in a golden past, she has to be recovered as an answer to contemporary feminist questions (1990). Srividya Natarajan too locates in the devadasi such an 'agency' arguing how 'modernity' has erased out the possibilities available to women in the past (1997). Giti Thadani in a similar move argues that temple architecture and ancient Hindu mythologies celebrate lesbianism. She however problematically suggests that this legacy was destroyed with the entry of both Islam and colonialism (1996).

'intimacy' or 'oneness' is desired by the couple and is represented in the concept of *ardhanareeshwara*, the Lord Shiva bodily represented as half woman and half man (1989, 83-84). The other notion, of 'conflict', that dominates the conjugal space is embodied not only in the universal 'battle between the sexes' but a specific cultural conflict arising from the threat that the wife poses to the husband, embodying in herself both the 'mother', who should be revered and the 'whore', who should be shunned (ibid., 19).

Kakar locates the cultural specificity of India in the place occupied by the story or myth in India, different from that of history or philosophy in the West. He characterises myths as dealing with an 'ultimate' reality unlike the empirical reality dealt by the natural sciences. Further, he says that myths lie beyond conceptual thought and have to be grasped only experientially (ibid., 3). Alongside myths, he also places popular movies and novels that he says bear traces of a uniquely Indian culture.[13] Though Kakar usefully draws attention to the presence of the story or the myth in cultural narratives, his characterisation of them as poetic and elusive, and as instinctively understood by Indians, is inaccurate. The problem with Kakar, as with many others, is that these myths that constitute Indian tradition are seen as continuous and unchanging from the Vedas to the present (See also Thapan 1997; Uberoi 1996; Vindhya 1998). Further, Kakar presents the relationship between the myths and the conjugal experience as

[13] Kakar talks about how individualism, which is central to the Western novel, is only faintly present in the novels here. "Individual characters of each narrative form are symbolic revealers of a much larger universe." (1989, 4). However, he says, its importance to understand a cultural phenomenon is different when it comes to traditional Indians and their modern counterparts, both Indian and Western (ibid., 2).

a causal one. It is important then to historicise the concept of conjugality, locating it in relation to the process of the shaping of modernity in India. We need to understand notions such as intimacy, along with companionate marriage as produced within modernity. It is within a language of modernity that we need to understand the place of myths. For instance, in relation to my project I need to understand the place of myths and epics in the modern-scientific language of the advice books by women. How do we understand the presence of *dharma* in the modern narrative of couple formation in the women's romance novels?

In contrast to Kakar's invocation of a 'monolithic tradition', Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that the notion of *pabitrata* or purity organises the conjugal space or romance in the Indian context. He suggests that this notion that marks the interiority of the modern Indian subject emerges in the context of colonial modernity as a resolution of the struggle between an individual's passion and his/her family values. This is counterposed to the West where the struggle is between an individual's desire and his/her reason. The notion of *pabitrata* then obviated the discourse of 'sexuality' which had functioned as a mediator between the psychological and physical in the West (2000, 141). Chakrabarty rightly suggests that the emergence of the pure and sanctimonious familial sphere, which we now see as 'tradition', was within colonial modernity. However, Chakrabarty does not discuss the gendered nature of *pabitrata* or of tradition. As has become well known by now we need to understand how the argument of possessing a superior tradition emerged as a nationalist response to constitute an Indian identity vis-à-vis the colonisers. Tradition was embodied in the domestic or familial sphere

and had to be borne by the woman (Chatterjee 1989). In this context, how do women negotiate the question of tradition in their writings?

Another perspective that delineates a woman's point of view in relation to tradition is that of Madhu Kishwar, who disclaims a feminist identification. Arguing against Western ideals of sexual liberation, nuclear family and love marriage she suggests that such a framing of agency for women would perceive women who either abstain from sex or who have an 'arranged marriage' as prudish, backward and without agency. The Western ideals are formed within a liberal framework that emphasises 'choice' and 'individuality'. Kishwar argues that this frame does not recognise the importance of the family, both the natal and the husband's family, seeing it as oppressive to women (1999a). Drawing on several cases, she tries to show that many women in India draw support from their families which act as moral deterrents to the husband's errant behaviour. They withdraw from sex as a strategy to counter the husband's loose behaviour and to command respect in society (1999b). So Kishwar's point is to suggest that women are capable of negotiating their agency within tradition.

Though Kishwar's argument is useful in pointing to certain problematic assumptions in liberal feminist formulations of agency, her tirade against individualism does not take into account ways in which notions of the individual along with other notions of modernity get formulated in Indian culture. Her positing of Indian tradition in opposition to a Western modernity mirrors the opposition of tradition-modernity that is found in the dominant feminist critique

that poses family as a site of violence. The celebratory framing of the family inadequately represents the complexity of women's relationships with family and tradition.

I would like to delineate a different form of non-Western critique, the point of which is not to posit cultural difference that celebrates the family or tradition in our culture but to examine how notions of conjugality and women's subjectivity travelled historically. If notions of selfhood, furthermore a gendered self, were inaugurated within colonial modernity (*Mahilasakhi* 1917a; 1919a; 1919b), what were the ways in which the woman as an 'individual'—having a *vishistathe* (uniqueness) or a *thannathana* (self)—were constructed (Niranjana 1990, 32)? What did these notions accrue, leave behind and translate themselves into? Further, how did these articulations shape a Kannada modernity?

Modernity and the Discourse of Conjugality, 1950s-1980s

In this section I discuss my understanding of modernity in relation to popular women's writings that were produced between the 1950s-80s. Though the inauguration of modernity with the introduction of new notions of conjugality comprised by choice, love and companionship and emphasising the woman's 'self' can be seen in popular print of the colonial period, the discourse emerging in the texts I examine do not parallel the former. Instead I suggest that we need to understand women's subjectivity and the discourse of conjugality in relation to the specific genres of the romance novel and advice writing.

I use 'modernity' not as a value but as recent scholars have suggested, to map the 'history of the present' (See Deshpande 2003, 44).[14] Studies on modernity in the Indian context have pointed to the inauguration of modernity in the historical conjuncture with colonialism. They have shown the emergence of new institutions, ideas and practices and the transformations wrought in Indian society with this conjuncture that have an impact even on our present.

Some of the recent interventions in the area of history and the law have shown how conjugality has been tied to the question of modernity in India (Nair 1996a; 1996b; Uberoi 1996). They show the production of notions of choice and of companionate marriage in late nineteenth-early twentieth century. In tracing the concept of conjugality in Karnataka, we need to place the notion of conjugality in relation to that of *dampatya*. *Dampatya* refers to the relationship between husband and wife, one that has to be reformed in order to meet new needs.

The modern discourse of conjugality in Karnataka began to take shape in the early twentieth century. Ferdinand Kittel's dictionary (1894), the first Kannada-English dictionary, does not list this word although it lists the word *dampati* which first meant the master of the house (dam + pati) and later referred to the husband and wife, especially in the context of their having to perform together the rites for the forefathers. Galaganatha's booklet *Dampatya* (1912) is

[14] Deshpande traces the social history of the term from the eighteenth – nineteenth century emphasis on Enlightenment values, that emerged in the West and sought to make itself universal through a measuring of other regions against it, to recent usages that bring to attention the specificity of an Indian modernity (2003).

among the first attempts to talk about the importance of conjugality in a modern frame. Addressing the reader, Galaganatha says, “Though conjugality is the foundation of creation, its importance has to be shown to everyone.” He talks about *dampatya* within the frame of *dharma*, that is, of *grihasthashrama* and the need to marry in order to be able to carry out the rites for the forefathers. Galaganatha largely foregrounds the women’s subjectivity as mother. However, there is also the factoring in of ‘choice’ of the man and woman to ‘see’ each other and decide on getting married, the need for compatibility between husband and wife, and elaborate descriptions of new child-rearing practices (1912, 25-52). The question of ‘choice’ in relation to women was also raised around the same time in other quarters. For example, in an article in *Mahilasakhi* a woman asks if she does not have the right to see the man she is going to marry and decide if she likes him or not (1919a). The early twentieth century was also the time when the age of consent for girls was much discussed in Kannada journals and magazines (KSCI 1917; Venkatacharya 1917; Parvathamma 1917; *Mahilasakhi* 1917a; 1918).

In the current project I do not argue for any such radical shift in conceptions of conjugality or women’s subjectivity during the 1950s-80s as had taken place in the colonial period. Neither does the period mark the emergence of a new discourse of conjugality like in the colonial period (Nair 1996a; 1996b). Nor is it an important phase such as signified by Tanika Sarkar when she argues that in the early nineteenth century conjugality became a site for the emergence of a nationalist discourse in Bengal before the former was replaced by the image of the mother-son relationship (2001). The period between the 1950s-80s marks the

phase of women's writing when there is a focus on the question of conjugality and a particular formation of women's subjectivity.

We need to understand the discourse of conjugality that was produced in these writings within the genre of romances and advice books. In the novels, I read the narrative of conjugality against the conventional narrative of couple formation. In the advice writings I examine the delineation of conjugality in relation to a rational and scientific language. Here conjugality becomes a symbolic terrain for the production of modernity in these writings.

The particular construction of women's subjectivity within the conjugal space in the women's writings of the 1950s-60s was different from early twentieth century constructions. Further, the novels impacted the language and framing of women's subjectivity in future Kannada literature and cinema.[15] I discuss in Chapter 5 how the popular women's novels that were beginning to be published after the 1970s drew upon this history. I also show in the conclusion how the mid-century women's novels opened up spaces for the articulation of the women's question in very significant ways.

I study the question of subjectivity firstly, in relation to notions of the *grihini* or 'married woman' that were produced and secondly, in relation to questions of identity. I will delineate below how we need to understand the

[15] These novels literally became 'scripts' and functioned as frames for the Kannada women's films of the 1970s, one of the representative directors of such films being Puttanna Kanagal.

construction of subjectivity, as identity, in these writings in relation to the question of modernity. I will show how I address the production of modernity in the context of these writings in specific relation to the establishment of the nation-state and the citizen-subject.

State, Citizen-Subject and the Modern

I suggest in this section that the novels and advice books by women are sites of production of a modernity in the sense that they represent the site of the citizen becoming a subject. Modernity, as scholars have shown, is not merely marked by the establishment of the nation-state but centrally includes the simultaneous establishment of the citizen, who represents an ideal and the historical struggle through which the citizen becomes a subject. This can be mapped through an examination of cultural production like the women's texts. Cultural production is the site of both the production of a dominant ideology and a confrontation of that ideology. Specifically, women, as author-citizens, writing soon after independence speak the developmental-modern language of the state. However, I ask whether they disrupt the statist language from their location as subjects.

I would like to mark the establishment of the state as important to the trajectory of modernity in India. I draw on the conceptualisation of modernity from a strand of post-colonial thinking which has consistently focused on 'modernity' in order to 'historicise the present' (Niranjana, Sudhir and

Dhareshwar 1993; Dhareshwar 1995; Prasad 1998b). Among these attempts to examine the practices of our contemporary life, Madhava Prasad marks the 'present' in the history of post-colonial nations as the arrival of the nation. The arrival, he argues, is not in any sense a "predetermined telos" but points to the "arrival in the present as a place from which to find our way forward" (1998b). Furthering Madhava Prasad's point, I suggest that this present is marked by the formation of the nation-state and of the citizen-subject. While talking about the citizen-subject we need to make a distinction between the citizen and the subject. Unlike the subject who is a historically located figure, the citizen, as Balibar points out, is only an ideal, an utopic figure who gets instituted by an abstract state. He (sic) is an indeterminate figure:

> The citizen properly speaking is *neither* the individual *nor* the collective, just as he is *neither* an exclusive public being *nor* a private being. Nevertheless, these distinctions are present in the concept of the citizen. It would not be correct to say that they are ignored or denied; it should rather be said that they are suspended, that is, irreducible to fixed institutional boundaries which would pose the citizen on one side and the *non-citizen* on the other. (Balibar 1992, 51, emphasis original)

Balibar further adds that "the citizen is always a *supposed subject* (legal subject, psychological subject, transcendental subject)" (ibid., 45, emphasis original). The formation of the citizen-subject includes the movement of the subject of the prince

(*subjectus*) to the citizen to the subject as a right-bearing individual (*subjectum*). The citizen becoming the subject is what I see as the journey that marks the "way forward." Explaining how the figure of the citizen-subject comes into being, Balibar says:

> I will call this new development the citizen's becoming a subject (*devenir-sujet*): a development that is doubtless prepared by a whole labour of definition of the juridical-moral and intellectual individual; that goes back to the nominalism of the late Middle Ages but that can find its name and its structural position only *after* the emergence of the revolutionary citizen, for it rests upon the reversal of what was previously the *subjectus*. In the Declaration of Rights, and in all the discourses and practices that reiterate its effect, we must read both the presentation of the citizen and the marks of his becoming-a-subject. This is all the more difficult in that it is practically impossible for the citizen(s) to be presented without being determined as subject(s). But it was only by way of the citizen that universality could come to the subject. An eighteenth-century dictionary had stated: 'In France other than the king, all are citizens.' The revolution will say: If anyone is not a citizen, then no one is a citizen. 'All distinction ceases. All are citizens, or must be, and whoever is not must be excluded'. (Balibar 1992, 45, emphasis original)

Thus the declaration of rights and “all the discourses and practices that reiterate its effect”, such as the Indian constitution, carry an internal contradiction that is embodied in the figure of the citizen-subject of carrying marks of becoming a subject and of being determined as a subject. Thus, the citizen-subject contains within itself not only earlier markers of the *subjectus* but also the gap between the citizen and the *subjectum* (ibid., 53).[16] Further, since the possibility of occupying the space of the subject (as a right-bearing individual or the *subjectum*) is premised on the historical and social positioning of the citizen (who is the utopic figure of the state). Thus, the journey of the citizen becoming a subject is marked by ‘conflicts’ that we need to map (Balibar 1992, 46).[17]

If we draw upon an understanding of the state and of culture as the site of struggle of different groups, the conflict of the citizens becoming subjects gets manifested in the realm of the state and of cultural production (Althusser 1971). Within the context of my thesis, the struggle of women (as citizens) becoming subjects is played out in the women’s writings in the narrativising of conjugality.

In thinking about the nature of the Indian nation-state vis-à-vis the Western state we need to additionally think about its particular constitution here.

[16] Balibar says that not only does the citizen-subject carry traces of the earlier subject, “if the citizen’s becoming-a-subject takes the form of a dialectic, it is precisely because it is *both* the necessity of founding institutional definitions of the citizen and the impossibility of ignoring their contestation —the infinite contradiction within which they are caught—are crystallized in it” (1992, 53, emphasis original).
[17] To quote Balibar, “The idea of the rights of the citizen, at the very moment of his emergence, thus institutes an historical figure that is no longer the *subjectus*, and not yet the *subjectum*. But from the beginning, in the way it is formulated and put into practice, this figure exceeds its own institution. This is what I called…the statement of a hyperbolic proposition. Its developments can only consist of conflicts, whose stakes can be sketched out” (ibid., 46, emphasis original).

Studies have pointed to how the Indian state, within the context of a combined and uneven development of capitalism, is characterised by a contradictory modernity (Kaviraj 1997; Prasad 1998a). Madhava Prasad argues that the Indian state form is bourgeois in so far as it is based on a parliamentary democratic form of government identified with bourgeois dominance and because it imposes on the economy a deliberate order of capitalist planning. However, this is not a bourgeois state in the classic sense because the capitalist class does not hold a hegemonic position. Power is exercised by a ruling coalition in which the bourgeoisie is one of the partners along with the landlords and the professional classes. This coalitional nature of power, that represents two conflicting interests constitutes the contradiction in the Indian state (1998a, 12). This contradiction has consequences, in being reproduced in cultural production as the conflict between tradition and modern. The significance of this is that unlike an understanding of tradition or *dharma* in cultural writings as an extraneous or destabilising element in the logic of the Indian state and modernity, it has to be seen as constitutive of it. However, we need to analyse particular articulations of the conflict to understand the nature of modernity produced in those instances.

To further delineate the relationship between the state and cultural production, I draw on Althusser's well-known theorisation of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), one of its constituents being culture, to understand culture as a site of the production of subjectivity (1971, 170-171).[18] However, we need to

[18] Althusser suggests that the process of subjectification is not merely through an imposition of repressive power but through ideology that interpellates individuals as subjects (1971, 170-171).

move away from an understanding of the state as an expression of class relations or as a resolution of the conflict among different social groups, though still recognising that the ideology of the state is a hegemonic one. We need to understand the state as an independent actor in its carrying out of its political functions (Kaviraj 1997). Further, we need to understand cultural production not as a re(production) of the state form, that maintains the resolved nature of the conflict but as sites of struggle. This is suggested by Althusser himself when he says that, "the Ideological State Apparatuses may not only be the *stake*, but also the *site* of class struggle…not only because the former ruling classes are able to retain strong positions there for a long time, but also because the resistance of the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there…" (1971, 147). Thus "the ISAs are the form in which the ideology of the ruling class must necessarily be realised, and the form in which the ideology of the ruled class must be necessarily measured and confronted" (ibid., 185-186). Drawing on Althusser's formulation and reworking it within the conceptual frame of the thesis to examine the discourse around women by the state and in women's writing of the 1950s, I ask: what were the different productions of women's subjectivities? As women writers, what was the nature of the modernity that they produced? Did their gendered subjectivity allow for a different delineation of modernity than the hegemonic version?

In a reading of women's writing in India, Tharu and Lalita use a universalising frame of a national modernity to analyse regional women's writing. They argue that women writing in the 1950s-60s were silent about questions of

gender because of the immediate post-independence context when a nationalist ideology prevailed.[19] They mention how questions of resistance and domination disappeared and gender was contained within a statist policy. Even the questioning spirit of the socialists of the 1930s-40s is seen to be replaced by the new critical approaches that emphasised form and a universal aesthetic. They suggest that it was only with the late 1960s-70s that there was a regeneration of political engagement with the collapse of the scientifically planned, centralised Nehruvian economy (1995, 91-99). From this perspective, to anticipate my argument, it would seem as though women writing in the 1950s-60s in Kannada were exceptional in questioning the national modern. It would seem that some of these texts by precisely using the ideas of 'freedom' and 'identity' that was adopted by the nationalists against colonial rule, raised the same question in relation to women. However, in a later essay, "Citizenship and its Discontents", Susie Tharu uses a different understanding of the national modern in order to analyse the writings of a 1960s Gujarati woman writer, Saroj Pathak, which could be useful for analysing the discourse of the women's writing I engage with.

In the essay Tharu talks about the specific positioning of writers like Pathak that made possible certain forms of writing. She argues that this author-citizen, among others who wrote immediately after independence, represented the 'executive authority' speaking on behalf of the nation-state. From such a location, Pathak's writing articulated the statist language of the developmental-national-

[19] Tharu and Lalita also mention Frantz Fanon's argument about "how such developments in Algerian literature [mark] a definitive phase in the emergence of a national culture" (Qtd in Tharu and Lalita 1995, 91).

modern, but as a gendered subject her writing departs from that language. If the language of Pathak's journalistic writing manifests the language of the state, her fiction reveals the gap between the citizen and the subject to which Balibar gestures (Tharu 1998a).

I would like to further in my thesis some of the questions that Tharu raises in her essay. In the case of women's fiction, does the psychological mode of narrativising that depicts the mental conflicts experienced by women protagonists challenge the statist modern (see Chapter 3)? In the case of women's advice books, though the language used is that of the scientific-modern, in its delineation is there an enactment of its limits and failures? While raising the question of modernity in these writings, they have largely been analysed in relation to a notion of 'equality' and the language of 'scientific-reason'. I would like to analyse these writings in relation to the notion of *dharma* that I see as equally framing these writings. My objective is not to recover *dharma* outside of the modern but to understand the production of women's subjectivity in relation to *dharma* and its significance. I use *dharma* not as a normative concept of Indian culture that either empowers Indian women (Kishwar 1999a; 1999b) or constrains her agency (Uberoi 1997) but as a modern concept that frames women's writing. For instance, how do we understand the presence of *dharma* in the scientific modern language of the advice books (see Chapter 4)?

Kannada Modernity

I will delineate below how I conceptualise Kannada modernity and how I understand the relationship between a Kannada modernity and a national modernity. Following my attempt to locate modernity in the establishment of the state and the naming of the citizen, and since such a formation in the contexts of the nation and Karnataka coincide, I see national modernity and Kannada modernity as complementing each other. The specificity of a Kannada modernity is, perhaps, in the way women writers chart a modernity from their location as subjects, something that will emerge through the study.

Attempts specifically addressing the question of a Kannada modernity are few and have focused on the cultural formations of such a modernity in relation to colonialism. Janaki Nair has analysed the effects of this modernity on the condition of women by probing into legal-administrative measures around women introduced in the colonial period (1996a; 1996b). Shivarama Padikkal has inquired into how the genre of the novel which emerged in the late nineteenth century was fundamental to the constitution of a Kannada modernity (1993; 2001).[20]

[20] Other existing studies on Karnataka have mapped a social history, largely concentrating on the state as a modernising agent. Some scholars have looked at the colonial period to map the history of Princely Mysore as a state which did not come directly under the governance of the British rule, interrogating its claim to being a 'model state' in introducing reforms in relation to women (Jamuna 1990) or the backward classes (Thimmaiah 1993). In the post independence context, there has been a focus on Karnataka in relation to Devaraj Urs, who in his tenure as a chief minister in

Nair shows how a patriarchal conjugal space which portrayed "the illusion of mutual respect and companionship" was newly fashioned within a colonial modernity through a making illegitimate of sexual spheres such as those inhabited by the 'devadasi'.[21] Though the reform itself that fashioned such a conjugal space was not unique to Mysore, Nair marks the difference in the dynamics of reform in Mysore from the rest of India because of it being a Princely State.

Nair argues that in British-ruled India since the sphere of the family was seen by the nationalist elite as a space that was autonomous from colonial intervention, "both reform and resistance towards reform in that domain were born of the antagonism between the coloniser and the colonised" (1994, 3157). However, she suggests that the Princely States remained outside of this dynamic since the reform of conjugality was not initiated by the British state. Hence, the terms of discourse were different here. The Princely States introduced reforms as part of their 'modernising' project, which did not generate hostility among the subjects. Nair points to the importance of understanding the bureaucracy's role as "the repository of the bourgeoisie's political intelligence" to explain why the transformations enabled by it in the very core of the family did not generate hostility. This project of modernisation was the very terrain over which the

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the 1970s brought about significant land reforms (Manor 1980) or in studying questions of governance in the Panchayat Raj system (Narayanan 2002; Vyasulu 1997; Bali 2001).

[21] In this new economy the devadasi was reconstituted as a sex worker, deprived of the material and moral sanction that she had possessed before and was now deemed an immoral and illegal subject placed as the 'other' of, rather than an adjunct to, the middle class respectable wife. Her existence was however resentfully acknowledged as a provider of sexual service to the male subjects, whose sole privilege it was to have sexual relationships outside the confines of the conjugal space (Nair 1994, 3157).

Congress too sought to establish dominance, its criticism being directed against the authoritarian nature of the Dewan's rule (ibid., 3157).[22]

Padikkal shows in his study of the Kannada novel that the novel emerged as part of the new cultural economy of the nation. He argues that the Kannada novel simultaneously helped create a national as well as Kannada identity, both emerging as complementary notions, because the same process of historical change and modernisation underlay both the creation of linguistic identity as well as national identity (Padikkal 1993). While Nair draws attention to the specificity of a Kannada context that was different from a national context because the state here, unlike the colonial state, was not perceived as alien by the subjects, Padikkal argues in contrast that Kannada identity is coeval with national identity because of the similar processes of modernisation underlying both.

In my project, since I locate modernity in the establishment of the state and the citizen, I understand Kannada modernity as not necessarily divergent from a national modernity. If we draw on Nair's powerful argument of the Mysore state as an agent of modernisation, which continues to be so even after independence, with its focus on development, we actually begin to see that the Mysore state

[22] I would like to make a distinction between modernity and modernisation. As I have mentioned before, modernity refers to a series of historical changes in relation to ideas, practices and institutions that emerged with the encounter with colonialism and that transformed Indian society in a fundamental manner. One of the most important changes was the emergence of the nation-state and state-apparatuses such as the legal system. The state and its apparatuses are agents of modernisation because of their belief and articulation of certain notions of progress and development that coincide with the values of Enlightenment. Modernisation would be a strand of modernity, together with those that conflict with modernisation and even those strands that are translations of modernisation created through its articulation by different subjects.

mirrors the nation-state.[23] The qualifier we need to keep in mind is that though the programme of development initiated by the state is *in tandem with* the national, this particular strand needs to be traced *back* to the project of modernisation that is part of the Princely Mysore State history.

This project of modernisation is important in understanding how political questions of gender and caste were primarily addressed through state initiatives. In relation to the question of caste, for instance, reservations for backward classes were introduced as far back as 1918 with the setting up of the Miller Committee by the Mysore Maharaja. This was followed by the Mysore Backward Classes (Nagana Gowda) Committee in 1961, the first Backward Classes (Havanur) Commission in 1972, the second Backward Classes (Venkataswamy) Commission in 1984, the third Backward Classes (Chinnappa Reddy) Commission in 1988 (Thimmaiah 1993). This is unlike the manner in which non-brahmin articulation occurred in Tamil Nadu, in the mid-1920s, in the form of the Self-Respect

[23] Discussing the idea of development, Satish Deshpande suggests that "in the third world context [it] is something more than just a set of economic policies or processes; it is one of the crucial mechanisms that enables a national collectivity to be imagined into existence. In the most general terms, development-as-ideology helps articulate state, nation and economy, and plays a crucial role in securing the coherence of the new post-colonial nations" (2003, 56). In the context of Karnataka, it has been argued that non-brahmin elites who were articulating a politics based on representation and reform before independence consented to a state policy of development in the post-independence context as a means of building a regional identity. The scholars suggest that the development discourse was more enabling than identities based on caste, religion or language. This is in the context of arguing that a strong ideological fabric that knitted together the symbolic and the material threads is required to build a stable identity as a community (Thirumal and Smrti 2005, 139). Though the programmes undertaken by the Karnataka state soon after independence confirm the prominence of the development discourse even in the regional states, we may ask whether a caste, religious or linguistic identity could not form such an ideological fabric. It is more likely that the development discourse emerged through a suppression of communitarian identities within its modern logic.

Movement. What is common to both, however, is the public discussion of the question of caste in the colonial period itself, unlike in North India.

In relation to women too, questions of political representation were debated in the early 20th century. The extension of franchise to women in the Mysore Representative Assembly was debated in the late 1910s and early 1920s, before it was finally accepted in 1927.[24] There were discussions on how women's interests are best served by women when Rukminiyamma, the President of Maharani's College, Mysore was made a Board member in Mysore University (*Mahilasakhi* 1917b, 1). The periodical, *Jayakarnataka*, while reporting the Mysore Women's Conference in Davangere, proudly announced that it is the fourth such conference in Mysore, whereas there had not been even one such in British India. It also added that women of all faiths attended it, thus being a lesson for men who were having separate Hindu-Muslim, and Brahmin-non-Brahmin conferences, and that the Mysore conference should soon be made into an All Karnataka Women's Conference (*Jayakarnataka* 1931)

[24] Though there were Brahmin members who were speaking both for and against the extension of franchise for women, it is interesting that some of the members of the backward classes raise the issue of how Brahmin men who were so forthcoming while articulating the rights of women did not show a similar interest when it came to advancing the interests of the backward classes. Further, they feared that if education was made the criteria for voting, it would lead to a monopoly of Brahmin members in the Assembly. See, for instance, the points raised by D.S.Mallappa, a leader of the Vokkaliga or farming community and representing the backward classes, in the Representative Assembly (PMRA 1921). See Bairy 2003 for a discussion of how the interests of the state coincided with that of the Brahmins during the Princely Mysore period, indicating how the project of modernisation enabled the social mobility of the Brahmins.

There was an increasing consensus on the need to represent what was to be known as 'women's interest' through the 20th century, the state being in the forefront. Dewan Kantharaj Urs, in his concluding speech of the Representative Assembly session in 1921, when thirty-nine members voted for and fifty-eight members against the extension of franchise for women, stated that "this is perhaps to be expected in view of the inherent conservatism of the representatives of the rural population" and as for himself spoke of a "no distant date" when "public opinion will be created in favour of women, who possess the necessary qualification" (PMRA 1921, 214). By the time the Maternity Benefit Bill was debated in the mid-1930s, many favoured the bill, the only question now being whether it should be an eight-week leave or less. A Legislative Council member, Hayavadana Rao argues how with an active industrial policy being pursued in the state, we need to take up responsibilities of industrialism (PMLC 1936). Even the debates around infant marriage between late-1890s and late-1930s and that of widow remarriage in the late-1930s, that were not exclusive to Mysore, need to be understood within a self-representation of Mysore as a 'model state' and as part of its modernisation programmes.

In the sphere of health and medicine, a similar move towards modernisation can be witnessed. In 1930, Mysore became the first government in the world to start a network of birth control clinics in the state. This followed the concern expressed at the rapid population growth which might hamper production as early as 1881 by Dewan Rangacharlu when addressing the first session of the Mysore State Representative Assembly. Magazines and periodicals in the late 19th century

itself become spaces for discussing the need to modernise post-natal care. In the periodical, *Hitabodhini*, published by the Mysore Palace department, there are many such articles going back to the 1880s. These construct the idea of motherhood as something that has not been given adequate attention. There is a constant refrain that mothers are careless and need to take special care of their infants. An article quoting 'Dr. West *sahib*' [italics mine] states that it is because of the indifference of mothers that about a third of the one-year-olds die (*Hitabodhini* 1885b, 54-55). Practices used by mid-wives (*dadi*), especially the giving of opium, are criticised as being harmful to the child. Also, the mid-wife herself, for instance, is seen as unhygienic, as someone who drinks, and who needs to be monitored, if brought in at all (*Hitabodhini* 1885a; 1885b).[25] Such writings on child care and on the development of the child have continued since then.[26] (In Chapter 4, we will try to map some of the differences amongst these writings.) So we need to understand the health-related writings of the 1950s and later as not merely in relation to a discourse of development of the post-independence period but also anchored in an earlier history.

[25] Some other articles talk about how the infants should be fed with only milk, not solid food; with only mother's milk, not goat's milk; with milk from the bottle if necessary but to clean the bottle well. They ask the mother to abstain from feeding the child when she is angry because toxic substances will be released with the milk. They ask her not to give opium to the child in order to put it to sleep while she finishes her chores, and that this reduces the longevity of the child. This is not only wrong but also sinful. This modernisation programme will, however, include using indigenous practices: avoid applying foreign talcum powder on the baby for it sometimes shuts the pores; instead use the [fragrant, large, bright orange] *palasha* flower (See, for instance, *Sadvaidya* 1931).

[26] See, for instance, articles in the "Thayi-Magu" (Mother-Child) series in *Jayakarnataka* that were devoted to "the social and political rights of women and children" and were written by 'educated' women who have done their post-graduation (Ratnabai 1940; Kamaladevi 1940).

It could be argued that it is perhaps this particular trajectory of modernisation and development that enables the visibility of women writers in Kannada in the 1950s, a period that is usually seen as a silent period at the national level, both in the realm of fiction and of health-related writing. Further, it is perhaps in this history that we can locate the regional specificity of a Kannada modernity.

What also constitutes the specificity is the manner in which the Kannada women writers articulate the language of modernisation and development vis-à-vis that of the state. I study the site of women's writing in the 1950s-80s to map the nature of a Kannada modernity through an analysis of whether the writers reveal the gap between the citizen and the subject that Balibar talks about. I do not posit a specificity to claim a regional uniqueness that is *divergent* from the national; I actually use Kannada as a term that describes the *site* or location of modernity *in all its hegemonic connotations*. It refers to the contours of the production of a modernity in women's writing from the region. These specific contours could have been shaped, as I have suggested earlier, through the development agendas of the Princely state and its successors. Here Kannada as signifying a linguistic community and Karnataka as geographical entity are overlapping sites but they do not necessarily coincide.

We need to understand the construction of a modernity through the question of conjugality by women writers as merely a strand of Kannada modernity. However, it is an important strand that gestures towards an articulation of a modernity from the location of women as subjects. We need to further understand

how subject positions of caste and religious community intersect, interweave and perhaps even conflict with the production of modernity by these writers.

In the section below, I briefly map how I analyse the women's writings. I undertake a discourse analysis that not only examines the content but also the form of these texts. I suggest that an analysis of the content and form will gesture towards the production of a Kannada modernity by these women writers.

Methodology

My project is located in the field of cultural studies and intervenes in the disciplines of literary studies and feminist studies. I invoke 'culture' a) to mean cultural production, such as the women's writing I examine and b) to gesture towards my attempt to understand the cultural significance of these writings, which constitutes the historical dimension of the project. Both these attempts, which are inter-connected, would be a move away from literary studies to cultural studies, which by now includes a significant body of work.

In the first case, the shift is in the attempt to look at popular women's texts and the manner in which I approach these texts. Both mainstream and feminist literary criticism in Kannada have been dismissive of the mid-century women's romances. Feminist literary critics move away from mainstream critics, who see these novels as 'trivial' in both form and content, in order to show how they are about women's worlds. The former, however, find the delineation of the thematic

of marriage inadequate in reinforcing the idea of marriage within a patriarchal framework (Dabbe 1989; Sumitrabai 1989). This perspective leads these critics not to pay enough attention to these novels. A leading feminist literary critic asked me why I chose these novels if I was looking at the question of conjugality and exclaimed disapprovingly that I do not seem to see a problem with 'marriage' (Sumitrabai 2005). These novels are seen as concerned with romance and as not questioning patriarchal notions of conjugality and femininity. Instead, the 'syrupy romance' in the novels is perceived as creating 'false desires' in women. Although feminist readings admit to fashionings of selfhood in these novels, the critiques do not see the romances as offering a 'real solution'. One of the important interventions made by feminist cultural theorists has been to look at popular romances by women (Radway 1984; Modleski 1982). However, merely pointing to either reinforcement of patriarchy, or locating resistance at the level of the readers or texts is also an inadequate way of reading these novels.

My approach to popular women's texts is to move away from a literary analysis towards a discourse analysis. What the discourse analysis would constitute is an examination of the content and the form of writing that literary analysis has always been concerned with. However, I undertake such an investigation to understand the production of conjugality and subjectivity in the romance novels and advice books. I suggest that enquiring into the form of the narrative might provide a different understanding than a mere examination of the

thematic concerns.[27] Here I use form to refer to a) the genre of the romance novel and advice writing and b) the formal properties of a work, that is to its structural design, its style and manner in a wider sense, as distinct from content. This includes the language and tone of the narrator such as the conversational language or the tentative tone; the narrative devices used such as the use of metaphors, myths and the psychological mode. From this perspective, I will explore how conjugality figured in these novels departs from the conventional narrative of the formation of the couple. I will analyse the psychological mode of narrativising that represents the mental conflicts experienced by the women protagonists (Chapter 3). I will study the specific ways in which the advice books delineated the conjugal space using the language of scientific-rationality (Chapter 4). The discourse of conjugality and the delineations of subjectivity therein are symbolic of a modernity produced in these writings.

The centrality of the questions of modernity points to the historical dimension my project emphasises. This dimension is absent in the studies by Radway (1984) or Modleski (1982). If we examine how the discipline of literature has dealt with the question of history, within the literature departments, the hegemonic method of literary criticism has been that of New Criticism, which understood a text as complete in itself. New Criticism emphasised a 'close reading' of the 'text on the page' that called for an analysis of the form and content of the text without bringing in questions either of author's intent or more

[27] I use the term 'novel' to mean the work and 'narrative' to refer to the content and the form of the novel that includes not only the story but also the manner in which the story is told.

importantly that of history. At different stages, however, there have been attempts to change the ways of reading literature through the inclusion of the 'historical'. These efforts have been made by different schools, most centrally Marxist, post-colonial and feminist. In Western academia this has ranged from New Historicist attempts to see both how the text was a system of signs that produced a culture and the presence of history in the text to Frederic Jameson's reading of 'History' itself through narrative (1981).[28] With reference to the Indian context, there has been an interrogation of English not only by post-colonial scholars who have traced the history of English Studies but also through the inclusion of 'political' questions of gender, caste and community. The latter questions were raised by the women's movement and in the context of the Mandal Commission implementation (1990) and the Babri Masjid demolition (1992).[29]

I would like to briefly explore how the relationship between text and historical context figures in the thesis. If we examine the contexts of the 1950s women's writings, there were changes that were occurring around the time such as the establishment of the state, new modes of publishing, women's education and women's new identity as a citizen. How do we perceive the relationship between the two? One of the modes of analysis has been to posit a causal connection between history and representation. It is not unusual to find even today an

[28] One of the founder critics of this school is Stephen Greenblatt, who has done extensive work on culture, Renaissance studies and Shakespeare studies. One of his well-known studies was on the production of the subject and identity within relations of culture and power (1980).

[29] Apart from the well-known works by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan 1993 and Gauri Viswanathan 1989, see Tharu 1998a for reflections on how questions of gender and caste were raised in university campuses and classrooms.

understanding of a literary text as ‘reflecting’ a historical context. From this perspective, the fracturing of the conjugal space in the women’s romance novels would be seen as a ‘reflection’ of a social phenomenon. Even within Marxist cultural analysis, early conceptualisations of cultural production characterised it as the superstructure that was determined by an economic base, ‘determination’ used in terms of ‘reflection’ or ‘reproduction’. From this point of view the establishment of the state and the capitalist mode of production would be seen as leading to the emergence of the fiction and advice writings. However, as cultural critics like Raymond Williams have suggested, “this relationship [of ‘reflection’] cannot be found, or cannot be found without effort or even violence to the material or practice being studied” (1980, 32). He instead posits a less causal relationship between cultural production and economic relations.

Raymond Williams argues that we need to move away from an understanding of determination as a “predicted, prefigured and controlled content” to interpret determination as a “setting of limits and the exertion of pressure” (ibid., 32). Though this is an important re-evaluation, I would like to suggest a further revision where we not only cannot understand economic relations or more generally contexts as determining the production of a text but also should not understand the context as *preceding* the text. The latter understanding is in fact a residue of the earlier conceptualisation. It is imperative that we start with the text and investigate what history it produces. In the thesis the question takes the form of: what is the nature of subjectivity and modernity that women’s writing constructs? This is not to suggest that we cannot make a connection between the

text and the context. The connection we can make is to place the production of subjectivity and conjugality in the text vis-à-vis another site, which is the state in my project, and analyse where they converge with and diverge from each other. The discourse of conjugality and the delineations of subjectivity in both these sites constitute a part of what I call a Kannada modernity.

Some of the difficult questions that I have had to confront while working on the project are in relation to the weight that I place on categories such as conjugality and Kannada modernity. Let me begin by discussing the notion of conjugality. My primary question is whether the concept 'conjugality' is a very loaded term in relation to the novels that I study. Can it be substituted with the 'domestic' or does conjugality figure along with other notions such as sexuality, education and employment in the context of women's subjectivity? Let me answer these questions by looking at the project of historicisation that I undertake.

The notion of conjugality currently does not figure in the same manner in which I invoked it when I began the project. The initial aim of the project was to 'historicise conjugality' and I sought to fulfil this aim through a reading of women's popular fiction and advice writings. Now looking back on this question, I think the proposal contained a project of not only historicising conjugality but also historicising women's writing. At different points of time, the project emphasised one or the other kind of historicisation. Kannada critic K. V. Narayana raises a question while talking about efforts to write a 'literary history' (*sahitya itihasa*). He asks whether writing a 'literary history' means writing a

‘history through the literature’ or ‘history of the literature’. More generally, he seems to be asking the question of whether the project is a ‘history through the object’ or ‘history of the object’. He suggests that a project can undertake only one of the two and that the two are incompatible. Though the two projects might not be necessarily incompatible, we definitely need to recognise that they are distinct. The ‘history through object’ question directs me to identify conjugality as a social phenomenon and mark important moments or sites in the history of conjugality. It is possible that within this tracing, the women’s fiction and advice writings would be one such site. The ‘history of object’ question, on the other hand, requires me to specifically locate the question of conjugality within the parameters of women’s writing.

As of today, if I have to talk about the nature of the project, I think it has swerved towards a ‘history of the object’. If the shift was partly contained in the proposal itself, it occurred through the course of the project because of how I began to perceive these women’s writings and the manner in which I had to approach them. Conjugality was no longer a ‘social phenomenon’ but a notion that had to be located within the genre of novel and advice writing which contained their own logic. Conjugality in these texts is also a terrain on which the drama of women’s subjectivity is played out.

The next question that I raise is that of Kannada modernity. While discussing the notion of a Kannada modernity, the question that has troubled me is the specificity of such a modernity. I began the project by thinking about

specificity as ‘uniqueness’ or as ‘difference’ from the national trying to see if the novels and advice books articulated a sense of a regional history that was divergent from that of the national. However, I found that they articulated the same language of modernisation and development. Then I attempted to locate the specificity in the changing social contexts of the 1950s, such as the establishment of public sector industries, and the increase in women’s education and employment. However, I realised that though these contexts are important they do not constitute a modernity, if we understand modernity as central to the formation of subjectivity. In then recognising that the formation of subjectivity was not merely in relation to the establishment of the state but crucially in the formation of the citizen-subject, I was able to locate the specificity of the women’s writings, not as something that could be determined in advance but as that which emerged through the analysis of the women’s writings.

Chapterisation

In this first chapter, along with stating my research problem, I have provided an overview of the main concepts that structure the thesis by journeying through how these concepts have been theorised. I also showed how the concepts figure in the women’s writings I examine. I ended the chapter by reflecting on how some of these concepts have changed during the course of writing the thesis.

In Chapter 2, I trace a genealogy of the term ‘popular’, especially in its characterisation of the women’s novels of the 1950s-60s. I explore the

phenomenon of the popularity in terms of increased circulation and readership by relating it to new modes of printing, publishing and distribution practices that were emerging in the 1950s. I then show how this popularity produced a pejorative view of the 'popular' as catering to the 'market' by writers and critics of the 1950s, across different schools of thought. Within this context I locate the changing perception of the 1950s women's writing from being valorised in their times to being decried after the mid-1960s. I specifically take the instance of Triveni because during the peak of the debates around the popular in the mid-1950s she was quite well-known. Anupama had not yet gained visibility and Indira and Vani had not yet begun publishing. I discuss some of the critiques about Anupama, Indira and Vani that appeared in later critical writings. Criticism of Triveni's novels in the mid-1950s did not attribute to her the pejorative sense of the 'popular'. The derogatory sense was largely used to attack the detective novels and other 'cheap' pocket books that flourished during the time. However, with Navya criticism Triveni and other women novelists were perceived as writing in a 'popular style' that was seen as regressive. I suggest that underlying the Navya critique of a lack of form and the absence of a complex delineation of experience is their changed perception of *dharma* and tradition, where these notions become objects of denunciation. Navya criticism marked a turning point in the criticism of women's writing since its understanding of an aesthetic influenced even those speaking from other critical stances.

In Chapter 3, I discuss how the notion of the *grihini* was being fashioned in the novels written by women in Kannada in the 1950s-1960s. I examine the

romance novels of Triveni, Vani, M.K. Indira and Anupama Niranjana and argue that they created a new subjectivity of the *grihini* which posited her as confronting and restructuring *dharma* (ethics). The re-defining of *dharma* was through the positing of the woman's 'self' drawing on the language of 'equality' that is manifest in the developmental-modern language of the state. This confrontation significantly led to the blurring of lines between *dharma* and *adharma* (the unethical). This constitutes one of the aspects of the delineation of a Kannada modernity by these women writers. The other aspect lies in their critique of the modernist-statist logic. On the one hand, the women novelists represented the executive authority of the state that manifested itself in the language of the developmental-modern that is visible in their writings. However, in the unfolding of the narrative of the modern, there are instances when the writer does not speak from her position as executive authority but as a subject. In other words, the narrative reveals the gap between the citizen and the subject that Balibar suggests. This critique, I suggest, has to be read in the psychological form of the narratives, that is manifested in the narrativisation of the obsessive mental conflicts experienced by the women protagonists and in the hysterical excess that the narratives themselves represent. This form of 'excess', I suggest shows up the limits and failures of the modernist logic of the state.

Chapter 4 will address how the notion of the *grihini* was fashioned in the advice writings on conjugality by women between the 1950s-80s. The narrative of conjugality that the advice writings delineate is symbolic of the narrative of modernity in the post-independence context. Two important aspects of this

modernity that are manifested in the advice books are the representation of the *grihini*'s 'self' within the frame of equality and the scientific perspective from which the writings sought to shape the conjugal space. Like we saw in relation to the novels, the confrontation between *dharma* and the self of the woman and the consequent blurring of a normative *dharma* is also visible in the advice literature. Responding to the question of whether the mere presence of the notion of *dharma* alters our understanding of the modernist language of these writings, I suggest that we need to understand the notion of *dharma* as not outside of the modern but as part of the modernist-statist language. However, how do we understand the invocation of 'ancient' religious and non-religious texts in the arguments made for a scientific perspective in the advice writings? When we probe the particular invocation of these ancient texts, we see that they do not rupture the modernist language of the state. Thus, the gap between the citizen and the subject that we saw in relation to the novels is absent here. This, I suggest, is because of the form of advice writings that compel the writers who represent the executive-authority of the state to fashion the reader-subjects into citizens in accordance with the logic of the state.

In Chapter 5, I discuss how conjugality was narrativised in the popular women's novels of the 1970s. I try to understand these novels in relation to the modernist-statist language and ask whether they reveal a gap between the citizen and the subject that we found in the mid-century women's novels. I also analyse these novels in relation to the feminist discourse that was emerging in the early 1970s. I suggest that in the 1970s popular women's novels, we see a splitting of

the conjugality narrative of the mid-century women's novels that is manifested in two sets of novels. In the discussion of the first set of novels, that I call popular non-feminist, I consider the writings of Usha Navaratnaram and Saisuthe. The second set of the novels that claimed a feminist stance can be represented by the later novels of Anupama and those by H.V.Savithramma.

In the popular non-feminist novels we see a shift from the narrative of conjugality to that of couple formation. The nature of women's subjectivity constructed in the popular non-feminist novels posited the 'self' but not necessarily one that questioned *stridharma*. The novelists neither critique a normative *dharma* nor break the modernist-statist logic. The romance narrative moves towards couple formation. Even the mental conflict that is delineated by both novelists is towards bringing about a closure to couple formation. The form of these narratives is not the hysterical narrative that breaks the modernist-statist language that we saw in relation to the 1950s-60s women's novels. The delineation of conflict is very much contained within the language of the modernist-state. Women's subjectivity in the popular feminist novels was delineated through the confrontation of her 'self' with *dharma*, using the language of equality. The delineation of the question of subjectivity was in continuity with the mid-century women's novels. However, what marks a shift from the latter novels is not merely a sharper critique of *dharma* but often the rejection of *dharma*, which is presented in the popular feminist novels as constraining the woman's self. Though the popular feminist novels question a modernist language

of the state that celebrates an Indian tradition that is embodied in a Vedic Hindu culture, the novels do not adequately interrogate a modern language of equality.

The conclusion is divided into two sections. The first is a reflection on the significance of the mid-century women's writings in creating a space for future articulations of the women's question that was not limited only to the realm of 'popular' literature, popular in terms of literature that had a wide circulation and readership. The second section revisits some of the key issues that I have attempted to address in the thesis. While I present insights that I have gained, I also discuss questions I have not examined and those I hope to address in future research.

Chapter 2

Between the Aesthetic and the Political:
Women's Novels and the Question of the Popular

In Chapter 1, I laid out the broad theoretical frame of the thesis. Before I move into an analysis of the question of conjugality in the 1950s-60s fiction and advice writings by women, I would like to map in the present chapter the trajectory of the term 'popular', especially the manner in which it has been tied to the characterisation of the women's novels. This is important in understanding the changing perceptions of these works from the times in which they were written to the present within an increasing consolidation of notions of what is 'good literature'. A mapping of the specific debates in the Kannada literary sphere that led to such a consolidation will enable a reflection on the women's writings from a different perspective and illuminate possibilities of writing not only a different Kannada literary history but also a different feminist literary history.

I will begin by discussing the invocations of the notion of the 'popular' in the 1950s. The 'popularity' of women's novels in terms of their increased circulation and readership was made possible by pocket books (*kai hothige*/ *kise hothige*) and private circulating libraries that flourished at the time.[1] This

[1] This might be different from the expanse of public circulating libraries that came up in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh because of the library movement. See Venkatachalapathy 1994 for the case of Tamil Nadu where libraries were set in the Madras Presidency not only by the library movement but also the nationalist and self-respect movements in the 1920s-30s. The number of private circulating libraries here is spoken about by many readers (Hublikar 2004; Palsamudram 2004; Lata 2004). Srinivasaraju, publisher and critic, says that there were two or three libraries in a small town like Chikkaballapura where you could borrow books for one anna a day. He mentions

popularity was not specific to women's novels alone but was shared by many male novelists now part of the literary canon—Aa. Na. Kru, Niranjana, Basavaraj Kattimani—and those novelists who don't figure in such a history—detective fiction writers like Narasimhiah, Gunda Shastri, Sundariah, Ramamurthy and Dwarkanath.

In the first section I will map the phenomenon of the popularity of the novel in the 1950s in terms of the new modes of printing, publishing and distribution practices that were emerging at the time. In the second section I will show how the popularity of the novel produced a pejorative notion of the 'popular' as 'style' that became quite influential, as can be seen even in contemporary Kannada criticism (Narayana 1997; Amur 1994). This negative meaning is different from the manner in which popular novels were invoked in the colonial period and is specifically linked to the characterisation of the popular as catering to the 'market' by writers and critics of the 1950s, across different schools of thought, whether Pragathisheela (Progressive)[2] or Navodaya (New Dawn)[3]. Within this frame I will locate the changing perception of the women's novels of the 1950s from being valorised in their times to being dismissed after

book houses such as Arvind and Brothers, Forum Book House, Iyengar and Sons, and others like Paksharaja Frameworks, which carried on a side business of lending books (2004).

[2] The Pragathisheela school was started in the mid-1940s by A. N. Krishna Rao, popularly known as Aa.Na.Kru. Their manifesto suggested that unlike the Navodaya writers who wrote in a language that was difficult for the 'common man' to read and comprehend, the Pragathisheela writers would write in a simple and easily understandable style.

[3] Navodaya Literature is said to begin with the publication of B. M. Srikantiah's *English Geethagalu* (1921), which was a set of translations and adaptations of English poems. Sheshagiri Rao in his *History of Kannada Literature* says that the school marked the beginning of a 'new spirit' in Kannada literature. He mentions that the two main features of this school, derived from English Literature and the values it embodied, were its 'humanistic spirit' and of being 'democratic', moving away from the idea of literature as 'disseminating the tenets of religion'

the mid-1960s. Criticism of Triveni's writings in the mid-1950s did not characterise her novels in terms of the 'popular', the derogatory meaning of which was largely employed to dismiss detective novels coming out then. However, with Navya[4] criticism (Kurtakoti 1962), the manner in which Triveni and other women novelists were beginning to be talked about framed them within the purview of 'popular' literature. Interestingly, there was an increasing perception of popular literature as regressive not only from Navya perspectives but also from Pragathisheela, Bandaya[5] and feminist perspectives[6]. One of the reasons for the shift in the criticism of the mid-century women's novels I suggest is the changed perception of *dharma* and tradition with Navya criticism, where these notions became objects of criticism and which continue to be so even from other critical perspectives.

The Pocket Book Revolution

The popularity of the novel as a genre in the 1950s was not an unprecedented phenomenon. As many critics have pointed out the novel became a

(1983, 124). Some of the other leading writers of this school were Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre, Masti, K.V. Puttappa (Kuvempu) and Shivarama Karanth.

[4] The Navya school, as I discuss later in the chapter, was a response to the Pragathisheela school. It was established in 1953 by Gopalakrishna Adiga. Some of the other important writers are Ramachandra Sharma and U.R.Ananthamurthy. They were influenced by the modernist school of English literature, especially writers like T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound and their ideas of alienation and nihilism.

[5] The Bandaya (Protest) school emerged in the 1970s as a critique of the Navya school. Some of the leading writers of the school are Chandrashekar Patil, Baraguru Ramachandrappa and Boluvaru Mohammed Kunhi. The Dalit (Oppressed) school emerged alongside the Bandaya school, with dalits beginning to write for the first time. Devanooru Mahadeva and Siddalingaiah are among the well-known writers. Both the Bandaya and Dalit writers criticised the brahminical and upper caste centricity of Kannada literature and sought to include the experiences of dalit and other oppressed groups.

[6] Though there is no recognition of a feminist school within Kannada literary history, with the women's movement, beginning in the 1970s, feminist literature and criticism has become an important point of view in Kannada literature.

craze at the time of its inception in the twentieth century when Venkatacharya and Galaganatha were writing (Rao, Shankaranarayana 1955; Kurtakoti 1962; Padikkal 2001).[7] There is mention of how men and women flocked to read Agadi's *Sadbodha Chandrika* which introduced and serialised novels in the colonial period (Kurtakoti 1962; Kulkarni 1974).[8]

We need to examine, however, the specific social context in the 1950s that made possible the popularity of books in general and novels in particular. With the end of the Second World War in 1945, books that had stopped coming into India from the outside started flooding the market. These books were not exclusively from Britain, as was the case before Indian independence, but also from America and the Soviet Union. Paperbacks, such as the Penguin-Pelican series were made available at low rates for the English-reading public.[9] Literary works such as that of D. H. Lawrence, G. B. Shaw and H. G. Wells, as well as non-literary works such as James George Fraser's *Golden Bough*, Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Sigmund Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Karl Marx's *The Capital* and Maxim Gorky's *Mother* were some of the books which

[7] I cite Shankaranarayana Rao 1955 and Sheshagiri Rao 1955 inclusive of their first names for clarity.
[8] Writer N.K. Kulkarni, for instance, talking about the craze for *Sadbodha Chandrika*, mentions that it had about 7000 subscribers, just because of Galaganatha's novels that were serialised in it. He himself recalls how as children they used to wait for Thammanna Master, the man they will always be obliged to, to read out the novels to them (Kulkarni 1974).
Initially novels were either brought out as serials or were self-published. The first publishers to bring out novels independently are said to be Manohar Granthamale and Usha Sahitya Male (Rao, Shankaranarayana 1955).
[9] Penguin published the poems and prose writings of the modernist poet T. S. Eliot in 1948 and 1953 respectively. Eliot, among others, greatly influenced the Navya school of literature that emerged in the early 1950s.

sold many copies in their Kannada versions[10] and whose influence we can see in the writings of Pragathisheela, Navya and women writers (Rao, S 1975). Apart from these works, the novels of James Hadley Chase and American pocket books with "obscene covers" and stories depicting "terrible horrifying erotic scenes" were also in the market (Narasimhamurthy 1955).

Along with books coming from the outside, many local publishers mushroomed with the decrease in paper rates and publishing costs. A significant proportion of these books consisted of Kannada novels that came into the market because of 'pocket book' publishing. The pocket book was so called because of its size, most commonly that of crown (20 x 15 inches), which could easily fit into the pocket. It used cheaper newsprint than the regular paperback and was sold at eight annas (half a rupee) unlike the paperback that was priced at one rupee. It was uniform in terms of newsprint, letter type and illustrations. One of the publishers writes about how unlike other countries where subject determines the form, here it remains the same irrespective of the subject. He regrets that though not much money is spent on paper or calico binding, a lot is spent on the multi-coloured cover with a picture of a man and woman together (Chidambaram 1958).

The covers became a marker of the pocket book and an important mode of publicity for the book. Along with the printing of circulars, handbills and blurbs,

[10] A speaker at the Kannada Sahitya Sammelana, the annual Kannada literary conference, while talking about how the pocket book revolution beginning in 1953 enabled many authors and publishers to survive in the market, recollects that the novel *Mother* sold more than 3000 copies within a week's time (Rao, Shankaranarayana 1955).

covers were sent to the bookshops for display.[11] Initially pocket book novels were sold through the book agencies themselves personally delivering these books to people's houses. However, with the development of postal, road and transport systems it became easier to distribute these books (Ramachandriah 2004). Increasingly, publishers began to specialise in publishing particular kinds of books. D. V. K Murthy, for instance, became associated with publishing women's novels.[12] Vahini was the first to start pocket book publishing in 1953,[13] followed by Vidyanidhi Prakashana and Mohana Prakashana[14] (Rao, R 1955). Women's novels were published both in the pocket book format as well as the regular paperback format but at cheaper rates. Pocket book publishing, however, gave an impetus to the initial women novelists such as Triveni and Indira.

Many writers and critics remark on the dramatic change that was brought about by pocket book publishing in terms of the "revolution" it created. In his autobiography Pragathisheela writer Basavaraj Kattimani talks about the change:

> With 300 pages being sold at only Rs. 1.50, the number of books sold naturally increased. They used to print 5000 copies in the first

[11] Till 2005, Gita Book Agency, which started in the 1950s, had this display. Today we see a remnant of that practice with some of the covers of newly published books stuck on the wall along with the names of others (See Appendix 1).

[12] Though there are other publishers who published women's novels, D.V.K. Murthy published the entire repertoire of novels of Indira, Vani, Triveni and Anupama. Publisher and distributor Ramachandriah of Gita Book Agency says that once Murthy gained popularity in publishing women's novels, they only dealt with the distribution and no longer the publishing of women's novels, since Murthy knew the complete dynamics of bringing out women's novels (2004). See Appendix 2 for photographs of D.V.K Murthy's publishing house.

[13] There is a mention that because of Vahini, Aa.Na.Kru's *Rukmini* and *Grihalakshmi* is in every house (Rao, Shankaranarayana 1955).

[14] Though the year of establishing Vidyanidhi Prakashana and Mohana Prakashana is not mentioned, it is probably 1953, the same year that Vahini started publishing pocket books.

> edition. Till then even the first editions of the novels of Aa.Na.Kru, Karanth, B.K[attimani] were limited to about 1,500 copies… New pocket book series were started in Bangalore, Mysore, Dharwad, Harihara and Davangere. Publishers who did not have even a scent of literature entered the industry. Publishers hounded some of the well-known novelists like Aa.Na.Kru, Karanth, Ta. Ra. Su, B. K, Niranjana. Aa. Na. Kru especially started working like a factory that produces novels. There were queues of publishers in front of his house. He performed the unusual feat of writing five novels at one time. (1981, 363-364)

Though this was not exactly the case with women writers, there was an increase in both the number of copies and editions of women's novels from earlier times. D. V. K. Murthy mentions that he used to print 3000 copies per edition of Triveni's novels and 1000 copies per edition of the other women novelists in the 1960s (Murthy 2005). Ramachandriah, a publisher-distributor from the 1950s, says that around 1000-2000 copies were published at one time. He adds that unlike earlier times, it was guaranteed that all the copies were sold within a year (Ramachandriah 2004). The novels saw further editions, sometimes as many as eight (The eighth edition of Vani's novel *Chinnada Panjara* was published in 2002. In the same year the twenty-seventh edition of Anupama's advice book *Dampatya Deepike* was also published). The readership of the novels was clearly

wider than the above sales statistics suggest, considering that many of the readers borrowed the novels from private circulating libraries.[15]

The other issues that were emerging with the beginning of pocket book publishing were around notions of copyright and royalty. Though the publisher as an independent unit, separate from the author, had emerged around 1925 as Kannada associations, literary associations and individuals came forward to publish books, the practice of an oral contract between writer and publisher began only in the 1940s (Chidambaram 1958). There were discussions in the journals and magazines that expressed anxiety about the increasing importance of the publisher over the author and raised questions such as the payment to authors by libraries.[16]

Having outlined the revolution that pocket book publishing created, I will examine below how this led to a series of debates on the state of literature at the time and the criteria to evaluate good literature.

Catering to the Market: The Popular as Commodity

The popularity of the pocket book novels is remarked upon by many writers and critics of the period (Rao, R. 1955; Narasimhamurthy 1955; Bendigeri 1958; Kanavi 1955). Though many of the writings of the time talk about how the

[15] Palsamudram 2004; Lata 2004; Papanna 2004; Hublikar 2004. See earlier note 1.

pocket book revolution has given an opportunity to both young men and women to write and that some good novelists have come to light, they deplore the harmful effects of the revolution which according to them far exceeds the benefits. One of the typical complaints was that the pocket book industry churned out books that were without substance unlike literature that possessed an educative and moral value. Further, these books were seen as becoming an addiction among readers and as having a corrupting influence on them. Critics suggested that the pocket books were not realistic in their depiction of themes such as love and prostitution and that such portrayals would lead to a decline in the moral values of our culture.[17] The articles usually ended with the warning that unless the trend is corrected there is no hope for the novel in the future:

> If this situation has to change, writers should stop their quick writing and produce books on good subjects. Publishers should

[16] An article talks about how libraries, and not only the publisher, should give royalty to authors since the subscriptions that the libraries procure are because of the novels (Ramaswamy 1957). See also Bendigeri 1958.

[17] One such critic says:

> Let us now think about the influence of these books on people. The subjects of these books are usually social, about the everyday world around us, more or less about the behaviour of educated people. It is true that much of our lives revolve around man-woman problems. But what is shown in these novels is blind love, girls taking the wrong path, the pleasure and pain of prostitution etc. Not that these should not be written about. When we don't share the intensity of such experience…how can the novels be pure in taste? If you look at the description of prostitution in the novels, civilised people will hang their heads in shame. These descriptions have created a morbid taste in the readers. They do not have a good influence on them. If I have to share my experience, students find these novels more attractive than their lessons. They might not listen to the lessons, but they will never fail to read these novels, even stealthily. If we tell women to read good stories like *Vachana Bharata* [based on the Mahabharata], they will say they are boring and will instead read novels like *Natasarvabhouma*, *Nagnasatya* and *Masanada Huuvu* [which deal with the question of prostitution in a sensational manner]. One of the reasons for this attraction is their covers. If we publish covers that display a nude woman showing her body in various

develop the strength to reason. Thirdly, both readers and critics should vehemently condemn literature that is obscene and not serious. If this does not happen, there is no salvation for literature. (Rao, Shankaranarayana 1955, 162)

In such a context where 'bad' novels were said to be proliferating, some criticise the form of blurbs saying that they are practically written as advertisements. During the 38th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana, the annual literary conference of Kannada writers,[18] that was held at Raichur in 1955, Pragathisheela dramatist Sriranga in his Presidential speech advocated the formation of Book Clubs by publishers where they could bring together experts and get them to review the books they published. He pitted this against the existing practice of dailies themselves bringing out copies of "advertisement reviews" every one or two months to popularise the book (Sriranga 1956, 8).

The main targets of this attack were detective fiction and other 'cheap erotic' novels. Though none of these novels are named there are references made in writings and in conversation to detective novels and American-type pocket books.[19] There emerged what became known as the '8-anna book', which were novels usually dealing with romance, sex, thrill and mystery. There were innumerable publishers who multiplied around the areas of Balepet and Majestic

postures, our people, especially the youth will only drip saliva and not attain good character or culture. (Rao, Shankaranarayana 1955, 162)

[18] This mammoth event, where writers and people participate, was started in 1915. It is organised by the Kannada Sahitya Parishath and sponsored by the state government.

[19] See Narasimhamurthy 1955; Ramachandriah 2004; Sridharamurthy 2004; Hublikar 2004.

in Bangalore, and who made a lot of money from publishing these books (Sridharamurthy 1995).[20]

In some of the articles these novels are seen in tandem with cinema in terms of corrupting the taste of the readers, causing their physical and mental deterioration, catering to their base tastes, and being governed by the market. Writing on pocket books in Kannada, a critic says:

> For many years we have been using words like 'good book', 'book containing literary qualities'. But now with the age of the pocket book words like 'book selling in the market', 'a book that is popular even without containing a literary element' etc., have come into use.
>
> Today a book without any literary qualities might still find a 'market' in the bazaar. Even if all the critics criticise it, it might still become a popular work. In yesteryears a work used to be weighed by the literary elements in it. Today, it is weighed by people's 'demand'. Does that mean that 'market', 'popularity' and the fixed qualities of literature cannot go together? (Bendigeri 1958, 44)

Looking at how the words 'market' and 'popularity' are used in other fields, he talks about the field of cinema:

[20] Even famous writers were said to write these books, without giving their names, for the money it

> When we say that a film was successful in the 'market' or is 'popular', it means that the film has very few good qualities. If you ask why, everyone will tell you from experience that man's basest instincts are provoked by these films. Does that mean that good films never get a market? Never become popular? Good films might procure a market. They might even become popular. But this happens in only one out of every hundred occasions. (Bendigeri 1958, 44)

Furthering the analogy in relation to music and painting, he concludes, "Therefore, though 'market' and 'popular' are common words, don't they gain a special meaning?" (ibid.)

This kind of criticism that targeted the popular as bad because it catered to the *market* was a new mode of critique not yet adequately consolidated in the mid-1950s although it had come into currency at that time. Though the popular detective novels coming out earlier have been seen as 'base', I suggest that the specific characterisation of the 'baseness' of the novels in the 1950s in terms of a 'commodity' was unprecedented and was formative in future criticisms of the 'popular'.[21] The critique of the 'market' was to be later used to dismiss popular literature, in general and women's literature in particular, as unworthy of critical

earned them (Sridharamurthy 2004).

[21] Though there were Kannada detective novels coming out in the colonial period (see Padikkal 2001), the manner in which they were received is not documented. However, in the context of Madras Presidency the detective novels and other 'cheap' novels coming out in the 1920s were criticised as base and spoiling the readers (Venkatachalapathy 1997).

attention. Even critiques that do not entirely dismiss popular literature, however, do not see any great value in it. I will delineate below two such contemporary critiques, which attempt to put forward a frame by which 'popular literature' can be talked about and which resonate with some of the early criticisms of the popular.

One of the positions is represented by contemporary scholar and critic K. V. Narayana who perceives all popular literature as bad. He sees them as not different from the mass media where importance is given only to the 'mass medium' and the 'producer' and the primary aim of which is to produce a commodity. Hence, he is very critical of such literature and argues that the measure of analysis of such literature cannot be that of the 'aesthetic' (*soundarya*) but that of a 'commodity meant to provide pleasure' (used in a pejorative sense) that is governed by "production, market, distribution, consumer and broker" (1997b, 42).

Narayana allows for the possibility of popular literature containing the element of the 'aesthetic' and says that this kind of popular literature must be distinguished from the 'substanceless popular' or 'lowbrow' popular which is defined by the fact that it can be replicated and is not therefore a unique work of art (1997c, 277). However, he sees popular literature with substance as a rarity among the otherwise lowbrow popular literature. Narayana does not define or elaborate what constitutes the unique quality or the 'aesthetic' in literature. His main intention is to place the popular within the frame of the 'commodity' which

caters to the needs of the market, unlike literature which falls within the realm of the 'aesthetic'.

The position represented by Narayana is influenced by Navya critiques that stated that an art object should be unique and original in terms of its content and form. In relation to the popular, the Navya school is often seen as inaugurating the division between the literary and the popular. Let us examine below one such claim that also questions Narayana's point of view.

Sridharamurthy, unlike Narayana, argues against any position that reads, in advance, 'serious' literature and 'popular' literature as 'good' and 'bad' literature respectively. While perceiving Navodaya literature as writing about experience in a complex manner, he criticises it for being inaccessible to the people because of its language. He accepts Pragathisheela (Progressive) writing, though it was popular, because it touched the experience of the people by writing about 'struggle', 'society' and 'oppression'. However, he criticises Pragathisheela writers for their simple delineation of experience. Nevertheless, he argues that since they were aware of a 'literary tradition', they retained the finer literary details in their writing (Sridharamurthy 1995, 22). Though Sridharamurthy does not make a simplistic division between serious and popular literature, he nonetheless retains a Navya pre-occupation with the aesthetic.

Further, in countering criticisms of popular literature, Sridharamurthy says that contrary to arguments that popular literature is harmful, we do not see

evidence of girls who are steeped in reading romances turning 'revolutionary' and objecting to their father's wishes about whom they should marry. He suggests instead that these books have no influence because their nature is 'temporary' and 'ephemeral' (Sridharamurthy 1995, 25). He locates the beginnings of the criticism of the 'popular' with Navya criticism. He argues:

> It is only with Navya literature that a derogatory notions of 'popular' began. This is because of Navya experimentation with the form of literary production. Till now literature had a concrete form. Now it accepted formlessness in its fullness. It celebrated the pure form of poetry as a free entity. (Sridharamurthy 1995, 22)

Sridharamurthy emphasises that Navya writers, somewhat like modernist writers, gave importance to form. Whether Navya writers were exactly like modernists who saw history as extraneous to the text is a question we still need to ask since Navya writers were also influenced by Ram Manohar Lohia's socialist ideals and felt that they needed to bring in history and politics. However, Navya writers argued that the political should not override the 'aesthetic'. In the case of Pragathisheela writers, for instance, their main criticism was that the former's political agenda transformed literature as merely a medium for their politics, thus overlooking the nuances of experience. However, Navya writers and critics never specify what they mean by the 'nuances of experience' or the meaning of the 'aesthetic'. Most importantly, the Navya school created an apparatus of criticism that perceived and upheld only Navya literature as mapping life in all its facets

and dismissed other kinds of literature as simplistic or not aesthetic enough. This was the criticism directed against both Navodaya and Pragathisheela writers, and centrally popular women writers. This perspective was to become a hegemonic standard of criticism. Women writers such as Anupama and H. S. Parvati mention that after the beginning and spread of Navya criticism, even though they continued to write, they were excluded from literary debates since many of the women writers' works were no longer seen as aesthetic and worthy of being accorded the name of literature.

Having marked the hegemonic nature of Navya criticism, I would like to suggest however that the emergence of the criticism of the popular began earlier in the mid-1950s, with critics across Pragathisheela and Navodaya schools targeting the detective novel and popular publishing. This critique largely saw this industry as catering to the market. The famous Pragathisheela writer Niranjana while criticising 'literature without any substance', especially novels that were being widely read despite being bad, says:

> The only garden that is flowering and bearing fruit is that of the novel. The many exercises of flights of fancy in this field are amazing. All popular commodities are hurriedly produced, irrespective of quality, to meet the demands of the market. They are only sold on the basis of the name gained by the company which produces them. You might think that technique and style should be matched with the subject of a work. However, our

> modern novelist will first create technique, then the subject!…. If we take the detective novel the descriptions in the novel and real life are thousands of miles apart. (Niranjana 1956, 15-16)

If Niranjana's criticism of the popular is based on the premise that the popular caters to the market, the famous Navodaya writer, Shivarama Karanth criticises the popular on the grounds that it is neither educative nor providing a moral. In his Presidential speech at the 37th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana held at Mysore, Karanth says:

> Today our people are not reading essays, they do not want poetry; they are not interested in the literature of knowledge. The few who read, read only stories, novels. Why do they read novels? Not with the 'blind belief' of developing the mind. They want story, only story, no delineation of moral or elaboration of emotions. In accordance to that we too, like a grandmother who satisfies her grandchildren's taste for stories, satisfy the readers and have fallen to the depths of thinking ourselves to be great litterateurs. We fill how many ever pages and weave huge novels in a matter of weeks. If we call this 'literature', I believe that there is no harm done to those who don't read them. (1955, 10)

Thus, the criticism of popular literature was made by both renowned writers as well as common reviewers, as we saw in the beginning of this section.

The debate around the 'popular' is important since it marks the starting point for critical thinking about what constitutes good literature. It is noteworthy that it was around this time that a standard for criticism was beginning to be formulated. This was unlike reviews of literature before that were merely seen as different points of view. Many writers were arguing for the need for criticism that was fair, without vested interests and based on certain standards (Kanavi 1955; Niranjana 1956).[22] In the 37th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana, writer and critic Channaveera Kanavi says:

> The role of the critic is more important today than ever before. He should ruthlessly do the work of a gardener today. Only then we will know the value of novels like *Hamsageete* and *Kudiyara Koosu*… (1955, 165)

In the same conference another reviewer emphasises the importance of criticism:

> In our land the world of criticism has not grown as much as the world of the novel. Among the critics, other than a few, the rest see the face and judge the person's importance; read the name and write the review. Until we move away from such small-mindedness

[22] Niranjana mentions in his speech at the 38th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana at Raichur that there are attempts being made to build a Kannada literary tradition and history that speaks about the essence of Kannada literature. The magazine *Jayanti* around this time was conducting a series "Sahitya Vimarsheya Shikshana Ranga" (Educational Platform to write Literary Criticism) where it invited readers to write reviews of stories and published the best among them. It was in one such issue that Triveni's novel *Kankana* was reviewed (Sharma 1958). Among other critics, K. V. Narayana documents the beginning of criticism in the Pragathisheela period (1995).

> we will not be able to manufacture products worthy of becoming part of world literature. (Rao, R. 1955, 168)

Thus, we need to understand the relevance of the arguments around the question of the 'popular' as not only limited to that period or to a history of the popular but also to the history of Kannada criticism and literature. We need to understand the articles coming out during the debate as the initial attempts to set standards of "good literature" (Ramaiah 1956; Rao, S. 1956).[23] So, the division in the constituency of readers that Sridharamurthy locates in the Navya period is actually beginning to be created in the mid-1950s. This is pointed to by critic Srinivasaraju, though from a different perspective when he locates the division as arising from differential tastes of the readers: "Two kinds of tastes were being formed in the [50s, in the] Pragathisheela period, the popular and the serious" (1990, 53-54). This perspective unlike seeing the 'popular' and the 'serious' as constructed categories within criticism perceives them as given qualities that can be found in the readers. Further, this is a value-laden distinction that somewhat replicates Arnoldian notions of high culture and low culture as characteristic of different classes (See Arnold 1993).

Within the debate of 'what is good literature', for the Pragathisheela writers, such as Niranjana and Aa.Na.Kru, the question revolved around the

[23] Ramaiah talks about the need for writing to be governed by *shuchi-ruchi*, that is of purity in form and taste in meaning. Though the notion of *shuchi-ruchi* changes from time to time, these changes should have a limit. We should develop the earlier *shuchi-ruchi*: "The old should become new but the new should not become dirt" (1956, 254). Quoting the Commissioner of Coorg,

question of ‘what is progressive literature’[24], whereas for a Navodya writer like Karanth the question revolved around *niti* or the ‘ethical/moral’.[25] I would like to view the debates around the ‘progressive’ as the beginning of the debates around the ‘political’, which would be continued by Bandaya and feminist critics later, to broadly suggest a standpoint that speaks for the concerns of the oppressed and marginalised sections of society. The discussions around what constitutes the ‘literary’ were carried out with implicit or explicit reference to popular novels. What emerged from these discussions was the characterising of the popular in opposition to the ‘political’ and the ‘moral’ respectively. This is manifested in later criticism too. For instance, the popular is characterised as being politically regressive in the contemporary critiques made by Sridharamurthy and Narayana who I quoted earlier, though they speak from different positions. It is either seen as being patriarchal (Sridharamurthy 1995) or as sustaining certain myths of motherhood and womanhood (Narayana 1997).

Poonaccha, the Sringeri head and the Pejavar swami, he says, “Literature should have an eternal quality and not contain obscenities to be read stealthily” (ibid., 255).

[24] For instance, one of the most significant debates was between Niranjana and Aa. Na. Kru, where Niranjana criticises the latter for writing novels that were pornographic. The vehement reaction of Niranjana seems to arise from his perception that a Pragathisheela writer himself is using what he sees as a popular style and subject in the name of ‘progressive’ writing. This literary debate was not an exclusive one but was published in the newspapers to which many readers responded (See Vichara Vedike 1952*; Kannada Nudi* 1956).

[25] Another example of such a criticism from the perspective of *niti* can be seen in the words of an eminent writer, Nittur Srinivasa Rao, who writes about a writers’ responsibility:

> You cannot write for personal satisfaction. It should have *niti* as its inner core. Sometimes works take the easy path and reach even lower depths than entertainment. For example, there are many novels that talk about women’s status in a low manner, describe her as a ‘*svechche*’ (loose) person to gain success. From the point of art, some might accept it and some readers might get pleasure from it. What does one call such an age where such readers abound? Robbery, drinking, cheating, murders, cowardice—what good will society gain from watching films (sic) that show this in a stark fashion? It has become customary to call even this art. Is the argument ‘art for art’s sake’ valid? We need not discuss this. Even if this argument is accepted these works will only be symbols of the intemperance of art. There’s a great distance between good works and these books. (1956, 51-52)

The Navya critics who came after the Pragathisheela writers would add a new dimension to the debate by positing the popular in opposition to the 'aesthetic'. The increasing debunking of the 'popular' is probably the reason why Pragathisheela writers like Kattimani who were popular disclaimed such an identification in their later years. Kattimani's reminiscences in his autobiography about how he too wrote a few pocket books is accompanied by a feeling of shame and derision, even though he admits that he got some money from selling the manuscripts (1981, 364).[26]

We get a different picture of the popular novels if we understand how the readers responded to these novels. If we take the instance of women's novels, they were read by both men and women. They form a special category under the popular because they were central in constituting a feminised public sphere. This is important in the light of our conventional understanding of the sphere of the public as masculine and that of the private as feminine. As I have suggested above, it was only with the modernist critics that the masculinised public sphere emerged through replacing the feminised public sphere. The popular women's novels, created an impact most importantly on reading itself. It cultivated a desire and sometimes a craze for reading. Some of my respondents, for instance, made lists of the books they read and the dates on which they read the novels (Palsamudram 2004; Ayanna et al. 2004).[27] This readership was not limited only to a class of people who could afford to buy the books but also included others

[26] Talking about publishers writing letters to him asking him to write novels and sending cheques in advance, Kattimani says, "Yielding to this pressure I too wrote and 'flung' 4-5 pocket books in a year" (1981, 264).

largely because of the circulating libraries with their low membership fees. The readership also cut across identities of caste, age group and family background, along with that of gender. Even in terms of education, it required only a basic schooling for a person to be able to read these books (The writer M. K. Indira herself studied only till the third standard). However, the manner in which the generation of women who were born around the late 1940s invoke the women's novels was markedly different from the other readers. I will now briefly explore how we need to think about the impact of these books on the women readers.

It is common for scholars to talk about popular books as being read during leisure. Though the characterisation itself might not be inaccurate, the problem is when critics dismiss the books on this ground and see the experience of reading as 'temporary' or 'ephemeral' (Narayana 1997b; Sridharamurthy 1995). We need to understand leisure itself as a notion that was being produced during the time for the women readers, as outside of a school or work routine. Also, leisure does not merely indicate 'free time' such as during school-holidays for students and during afternoons for the housewife (Lata 2004; Palsamudram 2004). Some of my respondents mentioned that they would read these books during the nights after they finished household chores or after they came home from work (Hublikar 2004; Papanna 2004). Here, it is not merely the question of 'filling up' or 'occupying' time but also 'creating' time to read. We need to understand leisure as 'time for oneself', something that was emphasised in the post-independence advice writings as important for the woman (Niranjana 1971a).

[27] See Appendix 3.

My women respondents stated that their habit of reading began with *Chandamama*, a very popular magazine for children and they mention that they were reading stories of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* alongside the popular novels by both women novelists, and male novelists such as Aa. Na. Kru. and S. L. Byrappa. However, the popular novels created new pleasures of reading. The women's novels were formative in creating notions of love and romance. They also fashioned new ideas of femininity such as that of beauty and of conduct (Lata 2004; Palsamudram 2004; Veena 2003; Rao, M. 2004). The pleasure of reading can also be experienced in having to read these books stealthily. A respondent mentioned that her friend used to read Triveni's novels in class by hiding them beneath her textbook. Another respondent mentioned that she read detective novels or Aa. Na. Kru's novels without the knowledge of the family because the books were seen as 'vulgar' (Aiyanna et al. 2004; Rao, M. 2004)

New 'cultural practices' can be seen as coming into being with the popular novels. The women's novels helped create a 'community' among friends and relatives who would discuss the books or narrate the stories of the women's novels (Palsamudram 2004; Lata 2004; Aiyanna et al. 2004; Rao, M. 2004; Swarnagowri 2004). One of my respondents who lived in a village near Mangalore mentioned that she would daily narrate parts of a story to her friends during their walk from home to school (Rao, M. 2004). Many mentioned that they would discuss what parts of the story they liked and disliked, or how the story should have ended. These activities are not to be read as trivial because they suggest a complex process of identification that makes the readers integral to the

production of meaning of these novels. Importantly, for some of my respondents who did not have the time or were not allowed to be part of a community of friends, the book itself was seen as a companion (*jotegati*) (Hublikar 2004; Papanna 2004).

What I have tried to argue in this section is that, on the one hand, if the aesthetic was set against the popular in Navya criticism, the criticism against the popular begins earlier in the mid-1950s where it is set up against the 'political' or the 'ethical/moral'. Though in the 1950s itself, it was not the women's novels, as we will see below, as much as the detective fiction that was being condemned for their 'popular' style, the debates around the notion of the popular impacted later criticism of women's novels, where the arguments against the popular from either the 'political' or the 'aesthetic' stance came to be used against the second-generation women's novels. As a counterpoint, I have shown how popular novels, through examining the specific instance of popular women's novels, were perceived by the readers.

Women's Novels and the Popular: The Impact of Navya Criticism

The women novelists whom I study started writing in the early 1950s when the Pragathisheela (Progressive) writers had already been active, the school having begun around the mid-1940s.[28] The 1950s was a time when questions of

[28] The mid-1940s is a rough time line mentioned by writers and critics. However, Pragathisheela writers like Aa. Na. Kru had already started writing in the 1930s itself. See Niranjana 2001 and Sheshagiri Rao 1975 for an understanding of some of the stated aims of Pragathisheela literature.

what should constitute Pragathisheela literature was being heatedly debated. The Navya school was just being formed around 1953 though it gained visibility only in the 1960s.

Though women's writing, Pragthisheela literature and Navya literature of the 1950s-60s were produced in the same context and do share certain concerns, I see women's writing as distinct from the other two. For instance, though gender was an important concern for the Pragathisheela writers and Freud's theories were drawn upon by Navya writers like Gopalakrishna Adiga and Ramachandra Sharma, the delineation of gender and the use of psychology by the second-generation women novelists were unique. Unlike the other two schools, they centrally raised in their novels the question of women's subjectivity and used the psychological form to represent the mental conflicts experienced by women protagonists (I will discuss some of these novels in Chapter 3).

Let us locate the mid-century women's novels in the history of literary criticism. Feminist criticism has pointed to how male-centric or male-stream criticism has marginalised all women's literature and characterised it in derogatory terms such as 'popular literature', 'sentimental literature', 'kitchen literature' and 'domestic fiction'. Many of these critiques perceive this marginalisation of women's literature as absolute, fixed and unchanging across time and space and as arising from a point of view which places the woman within a binary frame where 'women' are seen as inferior to 'men' (See, for instance, Bhumigowda 2003, 73).

I agree with those who argue that the mainstream Kannada canon has not accepted women's writing, except for writers like Veena Shanteshwar and Jayalakshmi N. Rao, whose writings have been seen as akin to Navya writing in terms of the complexity of form and their boldness in questioning tradition and morality. However, I suggest that we need to characterise the marginal status of women's writing in a more complex manner than in absolute terms. For this purpose, we need to examine how women's writing has been critiqued in specific historical contexts. I intend to investigate the history of the criticism of the second-generation women's novels in order to see whether it was always perceived in a derogatory fashion. If not, when did such a characterisation begin and what was the nature of that critique? Further, is this derogatory representation linked to the categorisation of women's literature as popular?

Feminist critiques have pointed to how women's literature and women writers of the mid-1950s were marginalised. These critiques are based on the fact that in the Kannada Sahitya Sammelana, the annual literary conference conducted during the time there was a separate 'women's forum' (*mahila goshti*), thus avoiding making the women a constitutive part of the main programme. Some of the women writers were trying to negotiate a space for women's writing. For instance, Triveni's and Anupama's speeches at the women's forum of the 37th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana (1955) indicate that they were contesting stereotypical representations of women in literature and were arguing that women need to write if their experiences have to be represented (Triveni 1955; Niranjana 1955). Gesturing towards the absence of a space where women could discuss their

works, humorist Sunandamma mentions that she had only seen the names of writers on books and had not come face to face with them until 1964 when a women writers' group met in the Kannada Sahitya Parishath premises (1991, 31).

Even while taking the above factors into account, I suggest that the early years of post-independence women's writing had greater recognition during its time than later. There was an acknowledgement that these authors were writing about 'women's problems' and that the representation of a women's point of view was important. Since Indira, Vani and Anupama had not started publishing by the mid-1950s, Triveni was the only one discussed in the critical discourse of the period. However, critiques before the Navya criticism that began in the mid-1960s acknowledged other women writers too. Even if there might have been critiques that found fault with Triveni and other women writers, I would like to emphasise that Navya criticism was different because its dismissal of these writers defined future critiques of these novelists. If we examine individual reviews of Triveni's novels in the 1950s, they acclaimed her for inaugurating the psychological novel and delineating characters within a psychological frame (Sharma 1958; *Kannada Nudi* 1955). One of the reviews of her novel *Doorada Betta* begins:

> It might not be wrong to state that Kannada novels that are based on psychological problems are very few, perhaps not existing at all. In the age of the Kannada novel, Srimathi Triveni has created a revolution with her new kind of novel. (*Kannada Nudi* 1955, 193)

This is unlike the critiques that came later which either questioned her status as the inaugurator of the psychological novel or accepted it with the qualification that she did not however raise any new questions in her novels (Rao, S. 1975; Prabhavati 2002). Secondly, Triveni was praised for her "natural" representation of incidents and characters. Her style in particular was seen as "powerful, though it was simple and without any loftiness". Her capacity to evoke humour was also noted (*Kannada Nudi* 1955).[29] This is unlike the Navya critic Kurtakoti's dismissal of Triveni's style as similar to Aa. Na. Kru's in the simple delineation of characters, clever dialogues and pace of story that panders to popular taste (1962, 191-201). Thirdly, Triveni was seen to possess the ability to evoke emotions in the reader that the character felt and to make the reader identify with the character. In a review of her novel *Kankana*, the emotional aspect in the novel is seen as evoking a similar response in the reader through making him or her identify with the character. Regarding the theme of love that the novel depicts the reviewer comments:

> I am happy to say it has come from a famous writer using the psychological perspective! I have no doubt that in this part the reader, caught in an emotional upheaval, will make an identification at the intellectual level and will be wonderstruck at the ideals that the writer raises! (Sharma 1958, 393)

[29] A review of *Doorada Betta* praises the novel for its natural depiction of the college and school. It notes the novel's humorous characterisation of the master and of the incident of the disappearing girls because of the 'lantern lecture'. It mentions that the quality of the novel is good; there is no unnecessary description of incidents and the story flows 'naturally like a river' (*Kannada Nudi* 1955, 194-195).

This complimentary description is unlike the criticism of excess emotionality and sentimentality later attributed to Triveni and other women writers by the Navya critics (Kurtakoti 1962).[30] Fourthly, the novels are not seen as dealing with trivial domestic issues (See for instance Shyamabhatta 1993). Instead they are seen as appropriately describing the women's world. For instance, an analogy in *Kankana* is referred to in a review: "The comparison of the Nilgiri hills to a hairpin is not only beautiful; it is appropriate in *Kankana's* women's world" (Sharma 1958, 393). Most important, Triveni's novels are seen as fulfilling the ideals of good literature, of "showing life's inner call" (ibid.). They are also seen as being "a guide to many young girls who are caught in a tradition that is still backward in relation to widow marriage [and other women's issues]" (*Kannada Nudi* 1955).

Not only individual reviews but even overviews of the novel of the period mention Triveni as one of the emerging women novelists writing about women's problems in the context of and in contrast to the detective fiction and other pocket books of the period.

> A few women writers, with their natural speech, represent women's problems in these novels in a superior manner. Among these Sri (sic) Triveni is the foremost. Writers like Karanth,

[30] This mode of characterising women's writing as 'excessively emotional' has been one of the dominant criticisms against women's literature. See for instance, a well known critic Ha.Sa.Kru's review of Vani where he talks about the need for a woman's point of view and appreciates Vani's works but also says that her lack of maturity resulted in 'excessive passion' in her writings (1972, 9).

> Niranjana, Kattimani write about our independence struggle and other political questions…. (Rao, Shankaranarayana 1955, 195)

Writer and critic Channaveera Kanavi reviewing the post-independence novels places Triveni in the same bracket as other good writers: "Some writers picturise every event from a psychological and scientific perspective. *Bekkina Kannu* [by Triveni] and *Anadi* [by Sriranga] have given birth to such hope." (1955, 165). Another critic reviewing the post-independence novels and urging writers to talk about socio-economic problems points to the main questions that different novelists raise. Writing about Triveni he says:

> Triveni in *Doorada Betta* talks about the conflict between older values and new reforms and its effect on the mind. It serves as a model for other such writing. The fact that reformers are unable to completely leave tradition behind them and are only able to shape the future in accordance with tradition repeatedly features in Triveni's psychological novels. (Narasimhamurthy 1955, 170)

Within the dominant criticism in the mid-1950s, Triveni's novels were seen as good, progressive literature both in subject and form. It is this recognition that compels later critics to acknowledge Triveni even if it is only to criticise her.

Let us take the instance of one of the early critical histories of Kannada literature, R. S. Mugali's *History of Kannada Literature*, which seems to have

been written during the time when Pragathisheela novelists were still around and when Triveni was being praised for her psychological delineation of characters.[31] Combining the notions of literature from Pragathisheela and Navya-Navodaya perspectives, he speaks from a viewpoint that understands literature as a means to articulate 'political' concerns and to delineate 'experience in a complex manner' respectively. In his chapter dealing with the short story and novel, Mugali talks about Shivarama Karanth, a Navodaya writer, as the best novelist because he "wrote from experience" (1975, 122-123). Then speaking about the women writers, he says:

> Among the women writers, Triveni has carved out a place for herself by the variety of theme and the high quality of her novels; the grasp of human psychology, which she displays in her novels, is admirable. In *Bekkina Kannu* and *Sharapanjara*, two of her foremost novels, she has made a convincing analysis of mental aberrations and shown artistically how domestic and social factors cause them…. Indira and Gita Kulkarni are some of the…women novelists who have made a mark and are shaping up well. (ibid., 125)

It is with Keerthinath Kurtakoti's *Yugadharma haagu Sahitya Darshana* (Spirit of the Age and a View of Literature, 1962), written from a Navya

[31] Though the book was published in 1975, I suggest the book was written earlier since Mugali states that M.K.Indira and Gita Kulkarni, who began writing in the late 1950s-early 1960s, are shaping well as writers.

perspective, that a turning point can be seen in relation to how women writers like Triveni were critiqued. As L. S. Sheshagiri Rao argues, though many might take issue with his opinions, Kurtakoti's work was foundational to literary criticism (1975). Apart from being the first to write a comprehensive history of Kannada literature, the influential turn that Kurtakoti made in relation to the criticism of women's writing was in the choice of writers for the Kannada literary tradition within a particular frame of realism. In this frame, Triveni's writing was seen as lacking in style and content and was placed in the category of the popular.

Kurtakoti makes a distinction between good realism and bad realism, mentioning Shivarama Karanth, possessing a certain literary quality, as representing the first, and Aa. Na. Kru, pandering to popular taste, as representing the second. Within this binary Triveni is placed in the tradition of Aa. Na. Kru. The popularity of Aa. Na. Kru is attributed to his style of writing, which entranced his readers. This style is typified by its simple delineation of character, excessive emotions, pace of the story and clever dialogue. This technique is said to intoxicate the readers and make them ignore other aspects of the novel such as the lack of complex delineation of characters and their moral dilemmas (1962, 191-197).

Like some of the critics before him, Kurtakoti accuses Aa. Na. Kru of lacking in morality. However, his main criticism is directed against the style of Aa. Na. Kru that others, like Triveni, adopted. This is a new kind of criticism which gets taken up by critics of Triveni later. Writing from a Navya point of

view, the 'political' is not of concern for him. Hence, Triveni and even the Pragathisheela writers do not get much mention in his critique. The latter are spoken about only to say how Niranjana and Kattimani initially followed Aa. Na. Kru but later turned away from the popular style of writing. Triveni's writing is seen as an inferior imitation of Aa. Na. Kru's, which has no depth or reason:

> Aa. Na. Kru's [realist] tradition does not end here. Many young writers have taken the same path. La. Na. Rayaru's *Jalari Mane,* Veerakesari's *Brindavana*, Triveni's psychological novels *Apaswara*, *Bekkina Kannu* have followed this trend. The lack of truth, immature dreams and lack of aim are some of the characteristics of these novels. The strong influence of cinema has masked life's realities. More than anything, the unnatural language of these novels makes us hold our head. These writers have lost their ability to listen to the common man's language. It seems like none of them have tried to match their language to the subject they have chosen. (1962, 200-201)

L. S. Sheshagiri Rao's history of modern Kannada literature[32] followed Kurtakoti's critique. However he belongs to an earlier generation of critics and takes a stance similar to that of R. S. Mugali, whose literary history I mentioned earlier. Arguing for a writing that talks about the common man's interests, the rural folk and the downtrodden and in a language that can be understood by them,

[32] *Hosagannada Sahitya* (Modern Kannada Literature), 1975

he praises Pragathisheela writing and criticises Navya writing, the latter of the two requiring a sophisticated audience who have read Freud, Jung, Kafka, Camus and Darwin. However, while advocating a style that is able to capture the essence of experience, he sees this style as absent in Pragathisheela writing since it merely points to different problems, takes positions and simplifies experience and emotion to such an extent that it distances them from truth (1975, 86-87).

Among the Pragathisheela writers, Aa. Na. Kru is seen as catering to popular taste, the notion of the popular by now having become an object of derision. Describing Aa. Na. Kru as just having passion and not giving importance to language, he says:

> We have to recognise the sad truth that with Aa. Na. Kru the number of books an author wrote became important. Language used indiscriminately, writing a work without seriousness — these gained unhealthy prominence. (ibid., 79-80)

If Aa. Na. Kru was the father of popular literature, women writers are classified as writing a few good novels and a large number of popular novels, mostly about family or about the affairs of the heart. He says that Triveni set the trend for women writers to follow. Speaking in a paternalistic manner, he says:

> Triveni was loved by all because one, she wrote when women did not write and two, she died young… She tried to use the

> psychological mode consciously… She was successful when she absorbed the mode well, as seen in *Bekkina Kannu* and *Sharapanjara*. Man-woman relationship is the prime object of her novels. The importance of living together, of the inner self is repeatedly represented. In her novels we see from a woman's perspective how much a woman desires man's love and motherhood … Though it might seem that because Triveni used the psychological form, she adopted a new path, the values in her novel are no different from the values that had been seen till then…We can say that she opened the chapter of women's enthusiasm for writing in the history of the Kannada novel. (Rao, S. 1975, 188-189)

It is interesting that speaking in 1955 during the 37th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana, Sheshagiri Rao talks about Triveni in the line of exceptional writers like Karanth, Aa. Na. Kru and Inamdar who have produced good literary works that are "tales of humankind" (1955, 157-160). However, after Kurtakoti's intervention, Sheshagiri Rao takes a different position. Talking about other women novelists, he suggests that Indira's *Tunga Bhadra* and *Gejje Pooje* shows her ability to "tell a story" and narrate "life's experiences". He says that Anupama's novels delineate middle class desires and problems in a simple and straight-forward manner but the style fails and turns "unnatural" when it is adopted "merely for its own sake" (1975, 190).

Somewhat like Kurtakoti, from a Navya viewpoint, Sheshagiri Rao says that the writer should represent the nuances of human behaviour in a style that is natural to the story. Apart from being realistic the writer should internalise the problem of the character as his or her own. The scathing criticism that is directed at Aa. Na. Kru is restrained in relation to Triveni and other women writers because of a benevolent accommodation of a women's perspective and a recognition that Triveni was among the first to initiate popular women's writing.

Contemporary criticism shares a similar attitude. Women writers are not dismissed, but their place in the history of the novel is not seen to be 'special'. K. V. Narayana's (1997a) recent essay on creative literature between 1956-1971 and G. S. Amur's (1994) history of Kannada prose that focus on the novel are predisposed towards a Navya position but with the rise and impact of feminist criticism in the 1980s, they seemingly accommodate a feminist perspective also.

K. V. Narayana claims to speak against views that on the one hand talk about the difficult circumstances in which women write but on the other hand criticise their writings. Instead he suggests that we need to understand the difficult circumstances in the present, for there is much to be expected in the *future*. His implication is that women's writing of the 1950s-60s is inadequate in the present because of the oppressed position that the writers occupy as women. He further locates the inadequacy in the privileged position that the women writers occupy by being upper caste:

> The existing literature validates the voice of an oppressed community but because it is upper caste it is caught in an upper caste dialectic which is manifested in the form of women's writing. That is, they either write only about domestic issues subscribing to the dominant ideological frame (it is possible that there might be one or two exceptions). This is in the form of the novel. Or in poetry the writing is largely individual-centric. (Narayana 1997a, 41)

Contradictorily then, being the oppressed, and hence constrained by 'difficult' circumstances, but not being oppressed enough, and hence not being in the most difficult of circumstances, contributes to the inadequacy in the mid-century women's novels in Narayana's view.

Commenting on the importance of the second-generation women novelists, G. S. Amur says that their novels by being different from that of male writers served as models for the *future* generation of women writers. However, within the limited creativity of these writers, he sees M. K. Indira as a better writer than Triveni. It is perhaps due to a compulsion to respond to feminist critiques that Amur devotes a chapter to women novelists where, like Kurtakoti, he places Triveni in the tradition of Aa. Na. Kru, while finding Indira a more 'complex' writer in the tradition of Masti and Karanth. The recognition that Indira gets could also be attributed to the fact that in later years when representing specific regions

in Karnataka gained prominence, her writings were beginning to be seen as portraying the details of the life and landscape of the Malnad region.

> In the tradition of the novel if M. K. Indira was influenced by Masti and Karanth, Triveni seems to have opened herself up to Aa. Na. Kru's influence. Her extreme dependence on dialogue is an example of this. In *Mukti* especially Triveni completely neglects to create a context and makes superficial the foundation of personal relationships... Unfortunately, we have many examples of how most of the future women novelists chose the easy path of Triveni, of 'manipulation' of reason and emotion to gain popularity. (Amur 1994, 252)

Elaborating on individual works of women writers, he locates Triveni's problem as a mere intellectual involvement with the characters which prevents her from identifying with them and further hinders her from understanding their experience:

> Though there is nothing unnatural about Rama's story, the main reason why it doesn't touch the reader is because Triveni does not respond adequately to Rama's inner core, her sadness. This is because for Triveni the novel is only an intellectual exercise. Whether it is the problem she takes up or the resolution she offers, it remains only in the realm of the intellect…Even Amrita's

> story…just remains a matter of the brain and does not come through as an experience. (Amur 1994, 250-252)

Amur's critique of Anupama is pitched differently:

> Since she had been studying women's problems in the public arena for many years, there is no lack of thought. However, unfortunately none of her novels touched a level that can be much talked about since the thought was not adequately matched by creativity. (ibid., 252)

Talking about the author's stance to the woman protagonist in her novel, *Aala*, Amur says that Anupama does not critique the heroine's perspective as she does that of the other characters. Thus the heroine's perspective becomes the novel's perspective. The protagonist is also seen as an 'aggressive feminist' whose responses are seen as 'extreme' (ibid., 255). Amur ends his critique with:

> While reading Anupama's *Aala*, I am constantly reminded of Byrappa's novels—the same paradigms, the same lack of problem, the same mechanical movement of the characters, the same excess of detail, the same lack of creativity in language. Byrappa's novels' popular attraction is so strong. (Amur 1994, 259)

Both Amur and K. V. Narayana whose critiques I mention above write from a Navya perspective but are responding to feminist and Bandaya critiques. From this position, the second-generation women novelists are grudgingly accommodated. They use a more sophisticated and nuanced language to marginalise the novelists than early Nayya critics, like Kurtakoti, who dismisses them unilaterally. However, how do we understand feminist criticism's ambivalence to the second-generation novelists? Though feminists have argued that these writers have attempted to represent women's worlds, they have criticised them for writing within a patriarchal frame (Dabbe 1989; Sumitrabai 1989). I would like to suggest that even feminist critiques continue to work with certain understandings of the aesthetic that Navya criticism put forward. I would like to point to one of the important aspects of the Navya viewpoint of the aesthetic that becomes a source of criticism of the second-generation women writers.

I suggest that a particular understanding of the relationship between individual and society or individual and *dharma* underlies the Navya notion of the aesthetic. From a Navya perspective society and social morality are seen as constraining human consciousness and the individual, this individual often being the man. In an essay delineating the precepts of the Navya school, G. S. Amur, for instance, suggests that if an individual's integrity has to be preserved it has to be through a rejection of social values and morality. He quotes the example of the novel *Mukti* written by Shantinath Desai (1961) where the protagonist agrees that murder and rape are morally wrong but questions why losing one's virginity,

committing suicide, drinking and having sex outside of a committed relationship are considered wrong (Amur 2001, 260). Keeping aside the question of society's implicit acceptance of these deviations by the man for now, I would like to bring attention to a Navya understanding of morality as completely constraining the individual's freedom. In one of his essays, renowned Navya writer U. R. Ananthamurthy too emphasises the importance of questioning morality. He suggests that to accept our moral values is perhaps even more dangerous than being selfish (Ananthamurthy 2001a, 458). It is within this framework that Ananthamurthy criticises Navodaya writers like Kuvempu and Shivarama Karanth, whom he sees as negotiating rather than fundamentally questioning *dharma* and tradition. In critiquing Karanth, he says:

> *Marali Mannige* envelops the reader in its richness of detail but it does not fundamentally question our moral assumptions. His novels expand, deepen and correct our traditional commitments. But it does not question them in depth…
>
> The form and subject seen in Navya writing, is very different…. If Karanth using a simplistic style asks questions pertinent to the social and the ethical/religious (*dharmika*), the [Navya novelists] ask questions relating to our existence. They do not ask if you are pure, kind, good or generous from society's point of view but ask whether you are true to yourself. (ibid., 456)

The question we need to ask is what is the content of this distinction between 'negotiating' with tradition and 'fundamentally questioning' it. What constitutes 'fundamental questioning' for Ananthamurthy? What the above comment reveals is not an understanding of Karanth as much as the Navya school's perception that morality and tradition are separate from the individual and that the former are fundamentally flawed. Along with the critique of tradition and morality, Ananthamurthy criticises excess emotionality in style. He says of Kuvempu:

> Since the central consciousness that Kuvempu brings into his novel draws on the different preoccupations of our culture and because he is excessively emotional, he easily goes along with his environment and loses the caution required to closely question it. (2001b, 452)

Within this frame we can understand why the second-generation women novelists who negotiate the question of women's subjectivity vis-à-vis *dharma* and use a narrative mode that is melodramatic, as we will see in the next chapter, are not seen as literary enough. Only those like Veena Shanteshwar, who can be read by Navya critics as dismissive of tradition and morality, are perceived as adequately questioning them and as writing 'boldly'.[33] I partly see the dismissal of the second-generation writers by feminist critics like Sumitrabai on the grounds that they do not adequately question patriarchy as replicating a Navya stance that only sees a dismissal of tradition and morality as a valid critique. The hegemonic

[33] See, for instance, Prabhavati 2002.

Navya stance that has mediated the understanding of what is seen as 'aesthetic' in the Kannada cultural context, and which has to be further investigated into, is crucial to thinking of a Kannada modernity.

What I have attempted to show in the chapter is that though the distinctions between the popular and the literary began with the Pragathisheela and Navodaya writers in the mid-1950s, the criticism was not of a normative nature. Navya criticism was a landmark in that it posited normative values of literature, which influenced the future critical vocabulary of literature, including the mid-century women's novels. Having said this, I would like to qualify that the influence of Navya criticism was limited to academic criticism and did not impact popular perception of the novels. Though readers made distinctions between 'serious reading' and 'light reading', the novelists who were placed under each category varied from one reader to another. The second-generation women novelists were situated in either of the categories. However, what is important is that irrespective of the distinction, readers continued to read the women's novels because the latter provided a 'pleasure' that was missing in other novels. As I mentioned earlier, the novels shaped notions of love and romance, and of femininity, of how to dress and behave. However, what was also fashioned alongside was a notion of 'selfhood' or *svantike* (Hublikar 2004; Papanna 2004). I will attempt in the next chapter a re-reading of the second-generation women novelists and examine the specific ways in which they produce women's subjectivity. I enquire into the notion of 'self' that the novels produced and place

it vis-à-vis the notion of 'self' that was produced in the modernist language of the state.

Chapter 3

Narratives of Fractured Conjugality:
Women's Romance Novels, 1950s-1960s

This chapter will attempt a re-reading of Kannada novels written by women in the 1950s-1960s and discuss how female subjectivities in the conjugal space were being fashioned in them. I specifically examine the romance novels by Triveni, Vani, M.K. Indira and Anupama Niranjana because though they follow the conventional romance narrative of couple formation, we see a twist in that narrative with the focus on *dampatya*. The novels especially represented the woman as a *grihini* or 'married woman'.

I argue that the 1950s-60s romance novels by women created a new subjectivity for the *grihini* which represented her as confronting and restructuring *dharma*. The notion of *dharma* refers to 'ethics', which provides a frame of duties and responsibilities within particular contexts and social relations. Instead of understanding *dharma* as a norm of Indian culture (see, for instance, Uberoi 1997), I argue that it should be seen as a site of constant negotiation, as is represented in the women's novels I explore. Though the re-defining of *dharma* through the positing of woman's identity was present in earlier writings such as those of Thirumalamba and Kalyanamma in the 1920s, what is new here is that the confrontation between *dharma* and the 'identity' of the woman does not lead to a positing of a new *dharma* but significantly to the blurring of lines between *dharma* and *adharma* (the unethical). The romance novels of the writers under

discussion for the first time attempted to articulate a notion of ‘patriarchy’ by drawing upon modern notions of ‘self’ and ‘equality’. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the notion of the ‘self’ of the woman, especially as an ‘individual’ emerged in the colonial period.[1] However, in the context of the 1950s-60s, I try to understand how notions of self and equality were invoked in the novels vis-à-vis their invocation by the newly established state that announced that all citizens irrespective of gender, caste or creed were equal and emphasised the equality of women through its different legislations and development programmes. If the language of self and equality constitute the developmental-modern language of the state, which was central to the modernity of the state, how do we understand the contours of the Kannada modernity shaped by these writers? Did the gendered subjectivity of the women writers enable them to produce a different Kannada modernity from the statist version?

On the one hand, the women novelists represented the executive authority of the state that manifested itself in the language of the developmental-modern that is visible in their writings. The language of women’s equality and development that was created through the modernising programmes for women, such as legislations about marriage, family planning programmes and the expansion of education for women is the very language that is visible in many of the writings by women themselves. For instance, a vision for the nation as secular-

[1] With reference to the Chinese context, Tani Barlow marks the emergence of the notion of the woman as an individual and not merely placed relationally as daughter, wife or mother as the beginnings of a Chinese modernity (1996).

modern frames Anupama's writings on marriage.[2] Vani in the foreword to her novel *Chinnada Panjara*, for example, mentions the possibilities that were opened up for women by the law that allowed for divorce (1958, 3). The writers were part of a desire for women's equality that we see manifested in the legislations enacted by the state in the 1950s-60s. These legislations begin with the Marriage and Divorce Act (1955) that provided for divorce and banning polygamy, followed by the law that gave property rights to women and allowed them to adopt children (1956) and the law against dowry (1961).[3]

However, the writers did not completely align with the developmental-modern language. The departure is not merely in the sense that the writers doubted whether the promises of modernity would be fulfilled. For example, Vani states in the foreword mentioned above that even though the divorce law exists, the culture we live in might deter women from making use of the law (1958, 3). The gap between modernity as an ideal and the cultural context in which it is implemented might in fact already be accounted for by the state, given our colonial history. What I would like to suggest is that these novels through their narrative structure represented the impasses in the narrative of modernity. That is, in the unfolding of this narrative, there are instances when the writer does not speak from her position of executive authority but as a subject. In other words, the novels represent the contradiction that the citizen-subject embodies, the gap

[2] For instance, Anupama's addressees in *Vadhuvige Kaivimathu* are 'all women irrespective of their religion', "Your name could be Shanta, Rita, Fatima, Parimala, Andal, Elizabeth, it could be anything. Whichever caste or creed you may belong to the human heart that beats in all of you is the same." (Niranjana 1971a, 9)

between the citizen and the subject that Balibar suggests, which I discussed in Chapter 1. Hence the construction of modernity in these novels was a two-pronged critique of a normative *dharma* and of a developmental-modern logic of the state.

I have mentioned the specific critique of *dharma* earlier. The critique of the developmental-modern language, I suggest, has to be read in the form of these narratives. By form I mean firstly, the genre of the romance novel, which can be identified by the particular narrative movement towards couple formation. In the mid-century women's romances we see a turn in this narrative with the representation of the conjugal space. Further, there is an undermining of the narrative of couple formation through a crisis in conjugality that the narratives depict. Secondly, form refers to the set of narrative devices used to structure the narrative, structure as different from the content of the narrative. One of the devices that these romances use is the psychological technique that undermines the developmental-modern language of the plot. The psychological mode is manifest in the obsessive mental conflicts experienced by the women protagonists and the hysterical excess that the narratives themselves represent. This form of 'excess' I suggest constitutes what Luce Irigaray calls a Feminine Symbolic that shows up the limits and failures of the dominant Symbolic.

[3] Though feminist critiques have shown that these legislations were problematic in their formulation of women's rights (Parashar 1992; Agnes 1999), some have argued that they created in the Indian polity a desire for women's equality (Azad 2003).

The creation of subjectivity in the women's romance novels can be evidenced in the manner in which later Kannada literature and cinema drew upon the language of these novels. We can see a naturalisation of the vocabulary of 'rights' and 'equality' in popular women's novels such as those by Usha Navaratnaram (whose first novel, *Hombisilu*, was written in 1971). Also, the 1970s Kannada films, which form a very important component of the Kannada culture industry, drew on the women's romances for their scripts.[4]

Historically, the women's question was raised in early colonial Kannada novels in the late nineteenth century. This remained a central question until the 1920s.[5] After the initial phase, it was in the women's novels of the 1950s-60s that the women's question was foregrounded again. The women characters in these novels were represented as embodying ideals of education—not only in terms of being literate but learning new manners and behaviour, of beauty and dressing, of wifehood and motherhood.[6] Among the readers of the novels were a significantly

[4] Some of the films are *Bellimoda* (1967), *Gejje Pooje* (1970) and *Sharapanjara* (1971), all directed by Puttanna Kanagal.

[5] Padikkal argues that with the beginning of the 1930s the women's question had been replaced by questions of self-rule and nationalism. The women's question that was raised in relation to education and marriage, within the frame of social reform, declined and a new femininity was fashioned. He suggests that the dominance of Gandhian nationalism in the 1930s marked a new stage in the Kannada novel. It provided a self-identity for the English educated class and the ability to think about notions of 'progress' through a particular resolution to the East-West dilemma. At this point of time, nationalism on the one hand accepted Western critiques of the caste system and untouchability but on the other, took on a revivalist turn, such as working towards establishing a 'Rama-Rajya'. Within this frame the English-educated class located their roots in rural India, even while accepting liberalism and utilitarianism. In the writings of the Navodaya writers (1930s), this can be seen in their emphases on the ethics of the individual, humanism, universal love, respect for all religions, nationalism and in their celebration of rural life. Realism became an important means to represent this new framework. This was also a time when the women's question declined (2001, 154-155)

[6] In Indira's novel, *Tunga Bhadra* the protagonist Muddurama who desires to modernise his wife tells his wife on their 'first night', "From tomorrow, you learn to read and write. I will teach you every afternoon and night. Tomorrow, I will buy you a new slate and book. I will teach you. You also learn from Manda, ok?" (1963, 57). Muddurama who goes from the village to town to study

large number of women—housewives, working women and girls going to schools and colleges.[7] This readership had come into being over a period of five decades. Some of the important events that mark this period are: one, already by the early twentieth century there was the first surge of women going to schools and colleges[8] and two, the educational reforms in the 1950s which made primary education compulsory for children between six and eleven.

By the early 1950s, there were new markets for this fiction. These books could be easily bought because they were published in paperback and were priced very low.[9] This form of bulk publishing enabled certain genres of writing to become very popular, such as the women's novels and detective fiction. These books were widely accessed from school and college libraries, state-run central libraries and private circulating libraries in different neighbourhoods.[10] Another very important reason for the popularity of these novels was that they were serialised first in periodicals before they were published as paperbacks. For

sees the girls there who "go to school, wear a long skirt with a design on the border, silk jumper and a woolen ribbon at the end of the braid" and feels ashamed of his wife because she is illiterate, does not know stitching and embroidery and sings in the wrong pitch (ibid., 20).

[7] In her autobiography, Anupama talks about the number of women who would discuss her writings wherever she went (Niranjana 1990, 59).

[8] Adequate evidence for this can be seen in both missionary reports and government policy documents in the colonial period. Special provisions were made towards girls' schooling, such as carriages being sent to homes of Muslim girls who were in *purdah* (Jamuna 1990; Venkatalakshmi 1991, 50-51), separate schools for high caste girls because of the anxiety and importance felt by the missionaries and Indian reformers to reach the brahmins (Jamuna 1990), and the attempt to include children of 'prostitutes' in schools (Education 1878). Parvathamma Mahalingashetty in her autobiography devotes a whole section to her schooling during the 1930s (1998, 68-98). She documents that, after her marriage in 1944, her husband gifted her books such as *Mankuthimmana Kagga*, *Anthahpura Geethe*, *Yashodhara Charite* and Kittel's dictionary, and that she learnt to read English books with the help of a dictionary (ibid., 296-297).

[9] Vahini publishers (1953) brought out paperbacks for Rs. 1 and Rs. 1.50.

[10] In an essay, the author talks about a woman who he would see going to the library with Triveni's books in her hand (Satyanarayana 1989, 37-38). Parvathamma Mahalingashetty refers to the central library in a small town like Chitradurga as early as the 1930s (1998, 91). Many readers

instance, Anupama Niranjana talks about the difference it made to serialise her novels first, saying that her books never sold as much or never got discussed by the public (either way the critics were not interested!) as much as those serialised (1990, 36). The popularity that these novels enjoyed is evident from Anupama, who was a medical doctor. She recalls that between 1962 and 1975, although she wrote a novel every year she would constantly be asked by her patients why she had not written anything recently (ibid., 59). She speaks about her popularity as something that motivated her to write what she knew her readers loved, despite the constant pressure from her husband, Niranjana, a renowned Progressive writer, to write 'good' novels instead of 'sentimental' novels (ibid., 28).

The romances written by women writers in the 1950s-60s are centrally concerned with the question of conjugality.[11] I read the novels as narratives of conjugality that raised questions of women's subjectivity in relation to marriage, education, work and sexuality. In this chapter I have attempted to historicise conjugality through interpreting the narrative constituents in the novels against the conventional romance narrative of couple formation. The analysis of the question of conjugality in the novels will help us understand the production of a Kannada modernity in the post-independence context.

I am interested in exploring how the articulation of conjugality in these novels might converge with or diverge from other conceptions of the conjugality,

mention that they borrowed books from private circulating libraries that flourished at this time (Hublikar 2004; Palsamudram 2004).

for instance, the *Navodaya* school's (1930s-40s) celebration of the couple as heralding the nation[12] or the early novels by women such as Thirumalamba and Kalyanamma (1920s) that also dramatised questions of marriage. The mid-century romances constitute a pre-history to the articulation of the question of marriage by the women's movement beginning in the late 1970s and provide alternate positions to the dominant framing of marriage in terms of 'violence'.[13] I also intend to interrogate through the narratives the dominant feminist framing of women's desire and notion of agency outside of the conjugal space (Vindhya 1998; Thapan 1997; Uberoi 1997). I limit the discussion in the chapter to some of the novels of Triveni, Anupama, Indira and Vani.[14]

Before I begin an analysis of the romances, I would like to differentiate the romances from the social novels that were published during the same time. The genre of social novels can be recognised by their different plotting of the narrative of couple formation and the kind of subjectivity that the female protagonists

[11] See Appendix 4 for the front covers of Vani's and Anupama's novels that represent the couple. The covers, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, became an important medium of circulation.

[12] This notion of the couple, for instance, is present in the poems of Anandakanda, which celebrate the modern couple and conjugal love through an imaging of the man exhorting the woman to be his companion in their journey together from darkness to light. See Appendix 5 for a copy of the poems with illustrations. The classical exponent of this form of poetry that celebrated the couple was K. S. Narasimhaswamy whose collection *Mysore Mallige* (1944) was very popular and poems from which was later used in a film of the same name.

[13] Feminist histories have shown that the historical trajectory of the women's movement in India, aligned as it were to the left, enabled both academic and political interventions in the sphere of marriage in relation to 'patriarchy', largely in terms of 'violence' (Gandhi and Shah 1993; Kumar 1998).

[14] In this chapter I look at Indira's *Tunga Bhadra* (1963) and *Gejje Pooje* (Anklet Adorning Ceremony, 1966), Triveni's *Sothu Geddavalu* (The One who Lost and Won, 1954) *Huuvu Hannu* (Flower Fruit, 1953?), *Bekkina Kannu* (Cat's Eyes, n.d.), *Hannele Chiguridaga* (When Old Leaves Sprout, 1963) and *Mukti* (Freedom, 1959); Vani's *Kaveriya Madilalli* (In the Lap of Cauvery, 1965) and *Chinnada Panjara* (Golden Cage, 1958); Anupama Niranjana's *Hridaya Vallabha* (King of Hearts, 1968) and *Himada Hu* (Flower of the Mountain, 1966). These novels were continuously reprinted, numbering between four to nine editions even till 1997. Since I translate the titles of the novels here, I use only Kannada titles throughout the chapter.

represent. The social novels talk about the life of a community or neighbourhood and delineate problems faced by the community.[15] These novels are located in the transitory phase from the feudal joint family to the nuclear family and is set in rural or semi-urban locations. The story revolves around many people and 'couple formation' is one of the many themes of the novel. This description would hold true for some of the novels of Vani (*Kaveriya Madilalli*) and Indira (*Tunga Bhadra*). The romance genre is different in that couple formation and the elaboration of the romance between the couple is central to the narrative. These novels are mostly set in urban locations. One of the distinguishing features of the romance novels, in contrast to the social novels, is that the narrative revolves around a female protagonist, focussing on her as an individual and portraying her mental and emotional struggles. This genre includes all the novels of Triveni and Anupama and some of the novels of Indira (*Gejje Pooje*) and Vani (*Chinnada Panjara*).[16]

I will briefly explore the narrativising of couple formation and the representation of women's subjectivity in the social novels. The social novels have 'closed' endings where the question of 'marriage' that is raised is resolved through the formation of the couple. These novels portray different kinds of impediments that many characters face in getting married. For instance, in Indira's

[15] Drawing on earlier studies by Srinivasa Havanur and T.W. Clark, Shivarama Padikkal suggests a classification of the early novels in Kannada into three kinds of novels according to their narrative delineation—the historical romance (*aithihasika ramya*), the social novel (*samajika*) and the romance (*ramya kathana*) (2001, 47-48 and 62-64).
[16] Other than the novels I discuss, there is Vani's short story "Baduku" (Life) and Indira's novel *Maduvege Ellara Oppige* (Everyone's Consent for Marriage) that was serialised in *Prajamata* (1972). The latter was similar to what is known as the 'psychological novel', which was

Tunga Bhadra, there are four such characters. There is difficulty in finding bridegrooms for the twins, Tunga and Bhadra, who are blind. Their brother Shambhu is mentally challenged. Raghu, the friend of the main protagonist Muddurama, wants to marry his cousin but is not allowed to by his father because the girl is unable to give dowry. Muddurama's marriage has been fixed with a girl, Krishna, when they were children. He is unhappy about the marriage because she is uneducated and wears a lot of jewellery, which for Muddurama represents a woman who is not modern and sophisticated (Indira 1963, 20-21). Though he begins to like her through the course of the novel, towards the end she dies and he marries his cousin who lives in the same house. Unlike Krishna, she is educated, has 'fallen in love' with him and 'chooses' to marry him.

In the social novels, though romantic love is depicted, it is not as central to the narrative as in the romance novels. It is invoked in the narrative without representing the rites of passage of 'romance' and falling in love. It may appear suddenly because of a 'necessity', as in *Tunga Bhadra*.[17] It also appears in a novel like Vani's *Kaveriya Madilalli* where it is the man and not the woman protagonist who is represented as speaking about love. The discussion on romantic love in the novel is between Kamakshi's brother Sundaru and his friend Ramanatha, both of whom have lived abroad. During the course of the narrative, Ramanatha falls in

inaugurated by Triveni. These novels revolve around a woman protagonist who is a psychotic. Here the woman's mental instability is shown to be a symptom of a social problem.

[17] These novels resemble the early realist Kannada novels where there is no dramatisation of the 'ideal' through the 'realism' of the novel. For instance, in Gulvadi Venkat Rao's *Indira Bai*, the love between the protagonist Indira and Bhaskar is central to the re-marriage of Indira. However, there is no narrative representation of the two encountering each other and acknowledging their love. In the novel, other characters are instrumental in bringing them together and suddenly Indira

love with Kamakshi. However, the discussion between Ramanatha and Kamakshi is not shown to us as first person dialogues but only conveyed through a third character. Interestingly, there is a dialogue between Sundaru and Ramanatha who are discussing whether Kamakshi is in love, where Sundaru argues that she will not 'know' what 'love' is (unlike themselves who have lived in the West) because it is not part of our culture (Vani 1965). The social novels point to a significant counter to the romance novels discussed in detail below in that the women characters in these novels are largely portrayed as being 'reticent'.[18] The former do not represent the woman as experiencing the conflict between tradition/*dharma* and modernity. Further, the novelist does not emphasise a modern vocabulary of the 'individual' or of 'equality' that the romances foreground.

In the romance novels, as I stated earlier, romantic love leading to couple formation is central to the narrative. However, these novels are different from the earlier romances, for instance, that of Kalyanamma (1920s), in that couple formation occurs in the beginning or middle of the novel and the novel focusses on the conjugal life of the couple. This does not diminish the significance of the delineation of romance, which is still crucial in the formation of the couple. However, once couple formation is complete, the novels represent the failure of romance to be embodied in marriage. This is a new and somewhat curious mode of representation that draws me to explore the thematic of conjugality.

is shown as loving Bhaskar without any previous suggestion or rites of passage (Padikkal 2001, 124-125).

[18] Padikkal shows how in the novels of Kalyanamma where there was a delineation of the 'sufferings' of women, the subdued woman protagonist became the model of later women

The romance novels enact the formation of the conjugal space in its materialities from the rites of passage to marriage—of the girl-viewing ceremony with descriptions of how the girl 'dresses up'[19], of the shy girl who blushes when she glances at her husband-to-be, the man unable to take his eyes off her, the exchange of looks, and the conversation where he asks her 'consent'[20]—to the honeymoon after the wedding and the detailed conversations and unstated dissatisfactions after marriage. Though critics dismiss these details as 'trivial' (Shyamabhatta 1993; Rao, S. 1982), they are what the readers recollect[21] and are important in the constitution of the image of the couple. The novels stage the materialities of conjugal life in their everydayness and dramatise the conflicts and dilemmas of the woman protagonists. Further, the extensive description of conjugality is accompanied by a critique that I will show below in my analysis of the novels.

These novels mostly revolve around middle class brahmin women who are initially living in a village or small town. There is a movement in the plot from the 'inside' to the 'outside' both in terms of a physical movement and an 'intellectual' or 'character' growth—the protagonist moving from the village/town to another town through marriage (*Huuvu Hannu*, *Sothu Geddavalu, Chinnada Panjara*) or

protagonists unlike the loud and brave 'Aryan' women protagonists in Thirumalamba's writings which celebrated the mental and moral strength of women (Padikkal 2001, 138).

[19] In *Chinnada Panjara* the novelist describes: "Malati put powder on her face, adjusted her *kumkum*, changed into a rose coloured silk sari with a bright red blouse, sprinkled some perfume on it, put on a necklace and wound the jasmine around her left hand before she came out of the room" (Vani 1958, 6).

[20] In *Sothu Geddavalu* Anand asks Bharati if she likes him, emphasising the importance of her consent, "I'm dark. If you don't like that, you don't have to be bound by what the elders say. You are as free to think about this as I" (Triveni 1997b, 29).

in search of job opportunities (*Mukti*), or a movement from the home to a college (*Hannele Chiguridaga*). The growth of the character is precipitated by a crisis in the protagonist's life in relation to 'marriage'—the protagonist not finding a man (*Mukti, Gejje Pooje*) or becoming a widow (*Huuvu Hannu*, *Hannele Chiguridaga*) or the husband moving away from the home (*Sothu Geddavalu*) or the inability of the husband to provide emotional and sexual satisfaction (*Hridaya Vallabha*, *Chinnada Panjara*). This crisis leads to the raising of questions of women's education (*Hannele Chiguridaga*), widow remarriage (*Hannele Chiguridaga*), of the woman going to work (*Himada Hu*) and of the woman's sexual need (*Hridaya Vallabha*, *Sothu Geddavalu*).

In examining the question of marriage, these novels centrally articulate marriage as the legitimate space for women, one that offers women protection and security. In *Himada Hu*, Lalita thinks, "Earlier she would pounce on her mother when she spoke of marriage. Now she didn't think so, since as a woman, she had to get married someday" (Niranjana 1966, 10) or later when Lalita wonders if she can divorce Shekhar:

> Shall I separate from Shekhar? Shall I get a divorce? Where will I stay then? My mother-in-law's house will be out of the question. My mother's house? For a woman who has left her husband it will not be right to live there. Everyone will abuse me, not my husband. Otherwise can I live alone? With such beauty, such youth will I be

[21] The first thing a reader mentioned was that Triveni's women protagonists would typically wear a

> able to live alone? Without the shelter of a man's arms, I will become a girl fallen on the streets. I will not be worth even a *paisa.*[22] (Niranjana 1966, 159)

Even though Lalita decides not to divorce Shekhar, the representation of the mental conflict that Lalita experiences is an important feature of the form of the romance novels by women that I will discuss in detail later.

Triveni's *Huuvu Hannu* is about the legitimacy that marriage gives to a woman. It tells the pathetic story of a woman who has lost her husband and her hardship in having to find a job and protecting her *pativratya* (loyalty to the husband). The story endorses the morals of a brahmin woman who is not supposed to go out of the home to seek work and who has to bear the consequences of living without a husband: "How difficult it is for a woman to live with respect when without the protection of a man" (Triveni 1969, 36). The protagonist, Rama, finally becomes a prostitute in order to survive. And once she has taken that path, the novel describes her life only as a physical and moral deterioration— her beauty was "a rose that faded like a withering flower" (ibid., 105) and "once when she was drunk, she continuously beat with a stick the poor orphan who was a helper at her place" (ibid., 104).

Literary critics, both mainstream and feminist, have criticised the concern with the thematic of marriage in the mid-century women writers. Unlike critics

'purple coloured sari with a green blouse' (Veena 2003).

like Sheshagiri Rao (1982) and Shyamabhatta (1993) who dismiss Triveni's novels on the grounds that topics like marriage are 'trivial', feminist criticism in Kannada, beginning in the 1980s, has argued that it was precisely through addressing questions of marriage and the domestic sphere that Triveni brought in the woman's world into the novel. However, even sympathetic feminist critiques have found the delineation of the thematic of marriage inadequate in its inability to move beyond the conventions of patriarchy and in ultimately endorsing the institution of marriage (Dabbe 1989; Sumitrabai 1989).

I instead suggest that the thematic of marriage and conjugality in the mid-century romances by women are not delineated merely in the mode of the early twentieth century novels of social reform which endorse ideals such as *pativratya*. Instead, there is a critique of these ideals. While pointing to how Triveni's writings along with the writings of other women writers may reproduce dominant notions of femininity and marriage, Seemanthini Niranjana argues that the narratives also bring out the contradictions between dominant notions of femininity and marriage and the compulsions produced by circumstances in the lives of her heroines. The narratives show how societal practices which revolve around notions of ideal femininity also contain within themselves contradictions of the same (Niranjana 1994, 195). I think the argument gestures to an important point. However, this argument is framed within a historically specific feminist concern of trying to show how these texts responded to the structure of patriarchy—referring to the subjugation of women by men—which is seen as

[22] A *paisa* is one hundredth of a rupee.

universal, notwithstanding the recognition of its varying structuring in different socio-economic contexts (Niranjana 1994, 199). This form of feminist criticism also locates the importance of women's writings such as Triveni's in representing an 'oppositional voice' to the dominant ideology contained in them (ibid.). Though the romances of Triveni and her generation do represent a critique of patriarchy, we need to understand the significance of the novels in being among the initial attempts to name patriarchy in the modern sense. The more important question for me is how we understand the obsessive conflict experienced by women within the context of conjugality and what that might imply in thinking about the formation of a Kannada modernity.

Taking forward the argument about the 'contradictions' in Triveni's novels, let us examine the instance of the representation of *pativratya* in *Huuvu Hannu*, where the protagonist Rama is forced to become a prostitute in order to ensure that her daughter is educated and brought up in a respectable manner. Though the novel endorses the *pativratya* ideal, seen in the condemnation of the profession that Rama takes up, the narrative shows that the ideal can exist only alongside its 'other', thus foregrounding the social construction of the ideal itself. In *Huuvu Hannu*, the 'growing up' of 'Sheela', which is both the name of Rama's daughter and refers to the moral quality of being 'sexually pure', is built on Rama turning into a prostitute. Through the novel, we see how the ideal and its other are constitutive of each other. After Rama becomes a widow, she initially has a physical relationship with a man who had been her husband's employer in order to feed herself and her daughter. However, Rama takes up prostitution as a

profession because of a remark that the man makes that the daughter Sheela is far more attractive than Rama herself and can earn millions through her beauty. Rama, stunned by this remark, finds herself in a dilemma. She wonders:

> Should Sheela become a prostitute? Should the girls in her class, the vagrants on the road call her by dirty names? What was Rama's husband's last wish? Hadn't he taken her word that she would get Sheela married to a respectable boy?
>
> But which respectable boy will agree to hold the hand of a girl who is the daughter of a prostitute? Sheela might be beautiful. She might be of good character. But will any respectable boy agree to marry her if her mother has sold her body to men? Will his elders agree? Will [Rama] agree to submit the responsibility of Sheela's happiness-sadness to an unrespectable boy on the streets? It is possible for her to forget the pain of becoming a prostitute if Sheela takes the hand of a respectable boy. A respectable boy will not marry her. A boy who is not respectable, she will not agree to. That means Sheela will remain unmarried. As long as she lives, she will be able to protect her daughter, even by giving her blood, from the eyes of lustful men. But what will happen to [Sheela] after [Rama's] death. Probably, like [Rama, Sheela] too will ultimately have to take up the very same profession.
>
> Sheela…Prostitute…!

> The very thought of this made Rama's body break out into a sweat. (Triveni 1969, 81-82)

The portrayal of the mental dilemma and conflict that Rama experiences is just like that of Lalita's in *Himada Hu* discussed earlier in the chapter. The story continues with Rama deciding to take up prostitution for a living. She in turn puts Sheela in a convent where she can be educated, requesting the nuns never to let Sheela know about Rama's existence or the knowledge that she is her mother. In time, Sheela grows up to be a beautiful, well-mannered and educated girl. The author remarks, "Just as the mother was falling in the depths of a dirty life, the daughter was rising up in the company of the civilised" (ibid., 108). As the narrative progresses, Sheela's college lecturer falls in love with her and marries her and they have a daughter, Shashi. Coincidentally, the family moves to a house close to Rama's house and Shashi befriends Rama. Despite being scolded by her parents not to go to Rama's house, Shashi often goes there to play. Towards the end of the novel Sheela gets very anxious about Shashi's behaviour:

> Sheela was walking around like she was stepping on thorns. She wondered if she should for once force her way into [Rama's] house, speak to her sharply and drag her daughter back home. But could she go to [Rama's] door? The wife of a college lecturer, wife of a soon-to-be-professor, could she go to her house and talk face to face? Wouldn't it be a lessening of her respectability? Why this

> girl had befriended her, God only knew. Was she of the same age, a companion, or a relation?
>
> Sheela's mind was not at rest till her daughter came home. (Triveni 1969, 190)

The novel concludes with Rama herself moving out of the neighbourhood. Sheela then heaves a sigh of relief:

> "Let the woman get lost. It's as though an ill omen has gone away…From now on we can be at peace. Thinking about her I wasn't even getting sleep."
>
> [Her husband says,] "I too have been worrying about the same thing."
>
> Sheela laughed sarcastically and said, "Dirty woman, who knows with whom she ran away!" (ibid., 197)

Though Sheela laughs sarcastically, we the readers know, without Sheela herself knowing, that the 'dirty woman' is what made possible a 'sheela'. As Rama herself says at one point, "To establish the peace of one house…she broke the tranquillity of another (ibid., 195)." This enactment of the making/unmaking of an ideal is central to the romance narratives. This is an important feature that marks their difference from both the earlier and the later novels.

It is in this double dynamic of the making/unmaking of the ideal that I want to locate the thematic of conjugality. Though the mid-century romance novels dramatise the desire for marriage and the romance in the narrative moves towards marriage, this desire should be seen only in tandem with the crisis in conjugality that the writings enact.[23]

Let us explore the 'crisis in conjugality' thematic in terms of the genre of the romance novel. In the early twentieth century novels by women, such as that of Thirumalamba and Kalyanamma that represented a 'problem of marriage', the problem was resolved through the formation of the couple. As characteristic of all romance novels, the formation of a couple constituent of romantic love also figures in the mid-century women's romances. [24] However, in contrast to the earlier novels, what is dramatised in the romances of Indira, Triveni, Vani and Anupama is that they significantly articulate the fracturing of the ideal of couple formation and, except for the novels of Anupama which I will discuss later, have tragic endings. This fracturing either takes the route of a) the absence of couple formation or b) the formation of the couple, which is however not posed as a resolution. The problem of marriage is now displaced onto the plane of conjugality.

[23] In the novel, *Huuvu Hannu*, though there is no direct elaboration of the crisis in conjugality thematic, I use it as an instance where we see the undoing of the binary between the ideal and its other. However, within the terms of the conventional narrative of couple formation in a romance novel, though couple formation is achieved with the marriage of Rama's daughter, it resists closure since it is premised on the fracturing of one of the central ideals that structure the narrative of couple formation: the respectable *grihini* as different from the dishonourable *sule* (whore).

The absence of couple formation, for instance, is found in *Mukthi* where the protagonist Amrita's desire is to inhabit the conjugal space. As Amrita thinks to herself, "Didn't she have the desire to get married? Wasn't she a human being? She had wanted to get married since many days, why many years now" (Triveni 1997a, 164). Initially, factors like Amrita's dark skin and her thick glasses come in the way of the fulfilment of her desire. Though she falls in love with a colleague towards the end of the novel, she finds that the man has a wife, who is mentally ill. The novel concludes in an open-ended manner with the man informing Amrita about the death of his wife and proposing to Amrita, without however showing her response to the proposal.

An instance where romantic love leads to couple formation but does not find a resolution in marriage is Vani's novel *Chinnada Panjara*, where the narrativisation merely shows the fracturing of conjugality and that too in all its violence. Though the protagonist Manjula has an arranged marriage and her friend Malati marries a man she loves, both are unhappy in their marriages. If Manjula's husband has multiple affairs with other women, Malati's husband who becomes disabled detests his wife to such an extent that he provokes their own daughter into despising her mother. A scene where the daughter shrieks in disgust on seeing her mother represents graphically the 'fracturing' of other ideals such as 'motherhood' (Vani 1958, 228). This scene appears in the narrative as an unusual and strange scene, something that disturbs the normalcy of the narrative. This

[24] Padikkal emphasises the importance of love in the early Kannada romances. See his analysis of Kalyanamma's novels, *Priyamvada* (1922), *Nirbhagya Vanite* (1924) and *Sukhalata* (1927) (Padikkal 2001, 137-141).

mode of introducing the bizarre element is a characteristic which I will bring up later in discussing the form of the women's novel. Another instance where the narrative shows the disruption of conjugality is in Anupama's *Hridaya Vallabha* where both Sadashiva and Mohini lament that the other has been unable to provide any sustenance or meaning to their own lives. As Sadashiva ponders:

> The feeling of loneliness slowly crept into Sadashiva. Mohini had taken him far away from his family. To gain her love was now unreachable like the sky. She was never satisfied with whatever he got for her. She only wanted fun and frolic. No sacrifice, no service, to live life was to celebrate. She didn't believe that human beings needed to have any other set of values. His thoughts were completely in the other direction. Along with sacrifice and service, he thought of how to alleviate the pain of others? He wanted to rise in his endeavors. More studies, more thinking, more practice. But he did not have inspiration. No peace of mind. In a house where dissatisfaction dwells, no efforts will come to fruition. (Niranjana 1970a, 129-130)

Mohini too expresses her dissatisfaction with Sadashiva to her friend, "What is the use if he is a great [doctor] for the world but not a good husband?" (ibid., 192) or to herself, "For him, service is more important than my happiness. So why does he need a wife? Marrying him, I have not experienced even a single day of pure happiness in my life" (ibid., 60).

Marital discord is represented as arising from a dissatisfaction that the woman feels towards the husband and vice versa. For the man, the basis of his discontent is the refusal of the wife to perform her *dharma* or duty as a wife, to be 'obedient'. For the woman, the unhappiness is sometimes because of an obvious 'fault' in the man, as with Sheshadri who has affairs with other women or with Vasu who is jealous about his wife (both in *Chinnada Panjara*). However, the dissatisfaction is also shown as not because of any identifiable fault, as with Shekhar in *Himada Hu* who is represented as an understanding husband but one who does not want Lalita to work because he feels frustrated that she is not present at all times to cater to his emotional and sexual needs. In either case, the men are shown as caring for and 'loving' their wives.

What the narratives gesture towards is a critique of 'patriarchy', even if there is a struggle to name it as such. An instance is *Himada Hu* where Anupama drastically shifts her authorial standpoint through the novel vis-à-vis the protagonist, Lalita. In the beginning of the novel she seems to approve of Lalita's desire to embark on a career. Shekhar's query about whether a home will break up if the *grihini* starts working gets this response from his wife Lalita: "Why should it? If both inside and outside work are equally looked into that will not at all happen. My opinion is that an educated girl should not waste her knowledge sitting at home" (Niranjana 1966, 32). The author empathises with Lalita when she is asked during the girl-viewing ceremony if she knows how to sing and cook. Lalita angrily laments: "How much have I studied! But here they are treating me like a *trivial object*! Whatever high office one holds, one cannot perhaps escape

the *degradation* of being a woman" (ibid., 45, emphases mine). However, towards the end of the novel Anupama portrays Lalita's focus on her work as a 'cruel' neglect of the mother-in-law suffering from arthritis (Niranjana 1966, 102-103), of her daughter who wants to play with her but is asked not to disturb her (ibid., 126) and of an 'understanding' husband who is emotionally and sexually frustrated and has no choice but to turn to another woman (ibid., 130). Even Lalita's home is described as unkempt with 'chairs strewn around' (ibid., 132) and as barren, of having 'a compound without a garden' (ibid., 75).

The conflict in marriage in these narratives is situated in the inability of the woman to find the frame of *niti* or *dharma* as sustaining her in her marriage. There are many occasions when this is pointed out: In *Sothu Geddavalu* (1954), Bharati's conflict between 'nature's logic/sexual need' and 'being faithful to her husband' is a situation where *kama* (sexual desire) poses a threat to *niti* (Triveni 1997b, 95 and 109). In *Chinnada Panjara*, Malati questions her mother about her (Malati's) duties as a wife when her mother says that it is not her *dharma* to act in a manner that will hurt her husband, Vasu, "How can you put the burden of *dharma* on my head? You tell me, what wrong have I done" (Vani 1958, 129)? Further when her mother tells her that there have been people like Gandhari who have blinded themselves for their husbands, Malati says, "That was in the epic/ in the old times (*purana*). Also she was a queen. Even if she blinded herself, there were people to serve her" (ibid., 130).

The inadequacy with the argument about *niti* or *dharma* comes from the structuring of the woman in these novels as an 'individual' and not merely as a partner in the husband's practice of his *dharma* (*sahadharmini*), that is, as only a relational being.[25] The notion of the self can be seen in *Chinnada Panjara* a) when Malati advises Manjula about how each one is to herself: "Who is there for all? Each one has to face her problems by herself" (Vani 1958, 240); b) when Malati talks about the strength of her self (*abhimana*): "Other than my conscience, I will not fear anyone else. Whatever problems I faced, my self (*abhimana*) could not be trampled and that is what angers them" (ibid., 235) and c) when Malati has to silently swallow the 'order' of her husband Vasu: "The trampled self (*abhimana*) was like a hurt snake" (ibid., 134).

The positing of the self as conflicting with *dharma* can be seen for instance when Lalita in *Himada Hu* talks about the struggle between her self-esteem (*ahambhava*) and duty (*kartavya*) when she is faced with the option of either continuing her career or protecting her home (Niranjana 1966, 160). Though the question might be asked if *ahambhava* suggests *ahankara*, that is selfishness or egoism, I suggest that the context in which it appears is ambiguous, as with Anupama's stance throughout the novel, allowing for an understanding of *ahambhava* as 'self'. In her autobiography, Anupama talks about the importance of the notion of *thannathana* or 'selfhood' that these writers were searching for in

[25] Badrinath (2003) in analysing the text *Mahabharata* argues that the place of a wife in it is primarily 'relational' where she is the 'other half of the husband'. He takes issue with a reading of '*sahadharmini*' as a partner to the husband in the performance of rituals, thus perceiving them as two separate entities. In either case, I suggest that the structuring of the wife is only within the unit of a couple and of being the secondary in the unit.

their writing and lives.[26] It is this notion of the woman as an 'individual' represented as confronting *dharma* or tradition in the frame of 'equality' and, as I will argue below, the blurring of the line between *dharma* and *adharma*, that marks their difference from the early twentieth century social reform novels of Kalyanamma. I suggest further that this forms one of the important constituents of the construction of a Kannada modernity in the post-independence context.

This conflict between the *dharma* of the wife and the 'identity' of a 'woman' is unlike the representation of protagonists in the social novels. In relation to the 'problem of marriage', Kamakshi in *Kaveriya Madilalli* does not have any of the predicaments that the women protagonists of Anupama and Triveni experience, of feeling oppressed by tradition, or the dilemma between following the *dharma*/duty of a wife and feeling desire as a woman. The novel does not pose the woman as experiencing the conflict between tradition and modernity. The 'problem of marriage' is raised as Kamakshi's dilemma to choose between Ranga and Viji who are her childhood friends, both of whom want to marry her. Since she does not want to hurt either, she marries her brother's friend Ramanatha instead.

We need to further understand the function of the notion of *dharma* in the novels as one of the foundational frames of the Kannada novel. Shivarama Padikkal suggests that the Kannada novel emerged as a new genre at the turn of

[26] We writers were looking for a 'self' as a human being who can think and as an intellectual being (Niranjana 1990, 32) and I have struggled as a doctor, writer, mother and finally as a 'woman' (ibid., 52)

the nineteenth century. This genre simultaneous drew on, and in the process redefined the mode of realist representation and historicisation of society which was the pattern of the English novel, and the frame of *niti* or *dharma* (ethic) which governed the earlier modes of story-telling in Kannada. Though Padikkal does not directly make this argument, he suggests it in the analysis of the early Kannada novels. He argues that the Kannada novel emerged as a new form drawing on both, the Western novel and the traditional Kannada story (*kathana*) (2001, 56). Examining the content of these novels, Padikkal suggests that the modernity question in *Indirabai* takes the shape of a conflict between tradition and the modern. The central thematic of the novel is women's reform, which is achieved through a separation of good and bad tradition and a fashioning of a new femininity in the frame of a redefined *dharma*.

Emphasising the importance of *dharma*, Padikkal quotes H. K. Raghavendra Rao who argues that *dharma* was a node used not only to analyse others but more importantly seen by the educated class as providing guidance and direction in the public sphere where there was no division between the secular and the sacred (ibid., 192). Padikkal's analysis of the different genres of the early Kannada novel also proves the point. In making a distinction between the realist novel and the melodrama he argues that the moral/ideal is connoted in the former whereas it is denoted in the latter, implying that both however are framed by an ideal/moral (ibid., 125). Talking about the detective novel, he says that unlike the importance given to bravery, strategy, counter strategy and logic in any detective fiction, the early Kannada detective novel emphasised on the story's moral (ibid.,

150). Padikkal also mentions that the periodical *Kadambariya Sangraha* (A Collection of Novels) published by C. Venkatacharya, who was instrumental in popularising the genre of the novel (*kadambari*), is a compilation of moral stories using current historical events (ibid., 236-237). This argument importantly points to the framing of the Kannada novel by *dharma*, not in the sense of an older notion but a redefined *dharma* produced within the context of a colonial modernity. What we need to investigate is the mode of representation of the *dharma*-modernity dynamic in the mid-century women's writing and how it might differ from the earlier writers.

In the novels of Thirumalamba and Kalyanamma, there is a staging of the conflict between *dharma* and modernity where modernity is symbolised by education and *dharma* by qualities of *pativratya*, patience and kindness. These writers were concerned about the deterioration of the status of women in society. They posited the ideal of an Indian cultural past where women were 'revered' and sought to re-establish it through an incorporation of values like education. That is, they resolved the *dharma*-modernity conflict through establishing a new *dharma* of the woman that now incorporated notions like being educated, possessing a self and the need to work outside of the home for the 'upliftment of women' in society. For instance, Thirumalamba argued for women's education on the grounds that it enabled women to run their households more efficiently. This position was different from positions of canonical writers like Masti Venkatesha Iyengar who did not accept the notion of woman as assertive, possessing a self and moving out of the home to the public sphere, even if it was to reform the

husband or the family (Padikkal 2001, 135-136). Though women writers of both the 1920s and the 1950s-60s were articulating a desire for modernity and for a re-defining of *dharma*, the significant difference between the older writers and those of the 1950s-60s was in the former's assertion of ideals like *pativratya* and positing of a binary between the good and bad women whereas the latter by contrast were questioning the binary between a normative ideal of *dharma* and its other.

All the women's novels written in the 1950s-60s were geared by the desire for modernity represented in the affirmation of science, rationality and legislative reform. As I mentioned before, the writers represented the executive authority of the state. Within this frame, I will describe the novelists in relation to the kinds of writing they represent. One of the positions occupies a 'modernising' space where the modern is portrayed as radically conflicting with or being incommensurate with tradition. For instance, let us examine Indira's *Gejje Pooje* (1966) and as a counterpoint read another similar nove1 by Shivarama Karanth called *Mai Managala Suliyalli* (1970). Both novels are about women belonging to the *jati* (family/caste) of prostitutes, where prostitution is their traditional occupation. The novels revolve around three generations of women belonging to different periods through the twentieth century. Karanth's novel focuses on the life of a first generation prostitute, Manjula, whereas Indira talks about the life of a third generation college-going girl, Chandri.

Karanth's point in the novel is to delineate a *niti* of the man-woman relationship for the youngest girl (who is also called Chandri) who at the beginning of the novel like Chandri in *Gejje Pooje* disowns her *jati* and its profession and wants to get married like other women. Through a description of Manjula witnessing her married neighbour being treated badly by her husband, the moral that is implicitly stated at the end of the novel is that women will have to 'deal with men' whether as prostitute or as wife (Karanth 1998, 262). Thus, Karanth seems to be suggesting that both tradition and modernity contain the 'good' and the 'bad'.

Indira's depiction of the problem is different from that of Karanth's. Chandri is not allowed to marry but forced into the rites of *gejje pooje* (the ritual of adorning the anklets before the girl enters the profession of prostitution). The problem is made more 'dramatic' with Chandri's 'lover' not willing to risk opposing his parents or society even after he discovers that Chandri is born to brahmin 'parents'. Her only way out in the novel is to commit suicide. Though Chandri is shown to be an excessively emotional person (there's a friend studying psychology who keeps saying Chandri is mentally unstable), the moral in this novel is to portray the futility of 'tradition' for someone like Chandri. For Indira, on the one hand tradition is represented only as 'bad' tradition in practices like the devadasi system or the caste system[27] and it is only modernity that is represented as making possible an erasure of caste markers and of foregrounding the

[27] See Indira's description of the division of the houses in the village according to the different castes (1966, 6) and her criticism of the attitudes of the brahmin women when Chandri's family moves into the neighbourhood (ibid., 12-16).

'individual'. However, if we read the plot carefully, it moves towards an understanding of how even in a modern space, these possibilities might not be realised. In ending the plot with the death of Chandri, and thus pointing to the impossibility of Chandri and her lover forming a couple, the novelist raises doubts about the promise of modernity of erasing caste-markers and instead foregrounding the 'individual'.

Anupama's novels before 1975 explicitly articulate a faith in the nation's project of development. In *Hridaya Vallabha*, when the protagonist Sadashiva's wife Mohini divorces him and Bakula—the woman he loves—dies, he contemplates whether he should end his life or become an ascetic. It is then that the sweet fragrance of *bakula* flowers wafts into his room, making him decide that he should serve society (Niranjana 1970a, 223-224).[28] The final picture that we see is of him among his books, being visited by a patient. Throughout the narrative, the unhappy conjugal life of Sadashiva is posited alongside the narrative of success of Sadashiva as a doctor travelling to 'international conferences' as a representative of Karnataka (ibid., 180-181). The manner in which modern medicine is talked about as a miracle that will save lives suggests a faith in science that the author evidently shares (See Niranjana 1970a, 16, 104 and 113). Anupama's *Himada Hu* attempts to represent how women too are enabled by the possibilities of modernity in a new nation. The novel begins with Lalita's dream about a tall mountain and her desire to reach the summit. This is followed by her contemplating her future. Having done her Botany Honours, her ambition is to

become a college lecturer and then a professor (Niranjana 1966, 9-10). Through the novel, she is shown as a very successful lecturer who is loved by her students. However, placing *Hridaya Vallabha* and *Himada Hu* side by side, it would seem as if the position of the male protagonist in the new nation is more clearly demarcated than that of the woman. That is perhaps why *Himada Hu* ends with the woman giving up her job to look after her family. Like Indira in *Gejje Pooje*, Anupama speaks from a modernising space that posits tradition and modernity as incompatible and sees Lalita's career as incommensurate with her duty as a wife.

Like Anupama's *Himada Hu*, Vani's *Chinnada Panjara* too poses the conflict between *dharma* and modernity. However, unlike *Himada Hu*, there is a resolution in *Chinnada Panjara* where the *dharma* of the wife is redefined to mean an individual ethic of the protagonist Malati instead of a mere parroting of it by her mother. The dissent of the women protagonists in *Chinnada Panjara* takes the form of asserting the self not outside of or through abdicating the conjugal space but within it. Both Malati and Manjula stay within marriage because of an 'ethic' of responsibility to the husband they feel, even as they provide critiques of the ideals of *pativratya* and 'obedience'. Both, for instance, refuse to have a physical relationship with their husbands. Manjula, adopts a celibate life, a decision the husband does not comprehend, while Malati decides to go out into the world to 'work' despite the husband's displeasure. This critique, while it uses a modern vocabulary of 'equality', does not however dismiss *dharma*. This is a position that is also portrayed by Triveni's novels. For instance, in *Sothu*

[28] *Bakula* flowers are small, white flowers that bloom in December and are found in the region of

Geddavalu Bharati faces the threat to her *pativratya dharma* from a sexual need. The novel endorses the woman's sexual act outside of marriage through questioning the morality of the husband who has also had a one-night stand with another woman and by stating that what constitutes conjugality is love (*priti*) and not morality (*niti*).

Vani's *Kaveriya Madilalli* (which is a social novel) speaks from a very different location where the woman is not represented as experiencing a conflict between *dharma* and modernity. The protagonist Kamakshi is located within *dharma* in this novel. However, the *dharma*-modernity conflict is located elsewhere, for instance in the ridiculing of a belief system among the brahmins of the village who excommunicate Sundar and his family because he has travelled abroad. However, the critique of *dharma* here is not like either the modernising argument of *Gejje Pooje* or the internal critique of *dharma* using a modern vocabulary in *Chinnada Panjara*.[29]

Despite these different positions what is characteristic of the romance novels is the critique of modernity that they make. The critique is inadequately captured in pointing to the plot where Chandri is made to die or Lalita has to choose her home over her career. I suggest that if we see the critique as located in the *form* of the narrative, we will get a different picture.

the Western Ghats.

Firstly, we need to read the narrative of the mid-century women's romances against the conventional romance narrative of couple formation. As suggested above, though the plot moves towards couple formation, the unfolding of the plot undermines the conclusion. We saw how the desire for marriage in these narratives has to be read in tandem with the crisis in conjugality that the narratives enact.

Secondly, I examine the narrative device of the psychological technique in the women's romances. One of the important aspects of this technique that is manifest in the romances is the narrativising of the mental conflicts that the women protagonists go through in having to choose between *dharma* and the 'self' of the woman. The portrayal of psychological conflict was a device also deployed by the Navya male novelists writing in the 1950s-60s. Both these writers were influenced by popular versions of Freud's theorisations, especially his theory of the unconscious and of sexuality that became widely known at the time. However, what is interesting is the manner in which the women novelists use the technique. We could say that the women novelists used the psychological form to represent women's feelings, her conflicts and desires that are not overtly expressed. However, we need to further investigate the nature of that articulation. I would like to argue that the portrayal of the mental conflict that the women protagonists experience within the conjugal space shows up in these novels,

[29] Even though I do not analyse the social novels such as Indira's *Tunga Bhadra* and Vani's *Kaveriya Madilalli* in detail, it would be interesting to think about these narratives that do not pose a conflict between *dharma* and modernity in relation to women.

despite the desire of the modern, the limits of modernity. I will discuss below how this is represented.

I suggest that these novels stage the mental conflicts in an obsessive manner, what I would call a 'hysterical excess'. We can see this, for instance, in the depiction quoted above where Rama experiences great mental conflict when she fears that Sheela too will become a prostitute. Here Rama is thinking about whether Sheela will be able to marry a respectable boy given her mother's disreputable history. The obsessive nature of Rama's conflict in having to make the decision to 'give up' her daughter is shown through the series of questions, the possible answers and the implications of each. In the portrayal of the conflict, the narrative plays on the notion of respectability. Though the notion is invoked in an absolute sense, our knowledge that it is Rama who is speaking and our awareness of the context that causes her to become disreputable only makes it ironic and thus undermines it. The narrative shows that the vicious circle of disrepute in which Rama is placed makes it impossible for her and Sheela to break out of it. The only way in which Sheela can become respectable would be to break away from that history. This would be at the cost of leaving behind her mother and significantly at the cost of forgetting and erasing her mother's history, as we saw in Sheela's condemnation of Rama, making Rama the 'other' of her own respectable self.

This narrative of excess is shown in a spectacular fashion in what have commonly been called the 'psychological' novels of Triveni, which have as their main protagonist a hysteric or a psychotic character. For instance, if we take the

novel *Bekkina Kannu*, it revolves around a young girl, Kusuma, who becomes a hysteric because she is deprived of love from her mother, who dies, and her father, who after marrying the second time neglects her for his new wife. The stepmother treats Kusuma badly and constantly abuses and beats her. Kusuma feels alienated and unable to resist her stepmother displaces her anger on her pet cat Polly whose green eyes resemble that of her stepmother. Though the novel does not revolve around conjugality, it might not be inappropriate to refer to the novel in the context of an emotional excess that is central to both the narratives discussed here. If we look at the description of Kusuma's hysteria in the novel, what is striking is not so much the hysterical behaviour of Kusuma as the manner in which the narrative presents it. The scenes of hysteria are presented as a tableau, a spectacle of Kusuma's hysterical behaviour. The narrative extensively uses animal metaphors to describe Kusuma's fear of her stepmother and her anger against her cat. For instance, the novelist uses the metaphor of a snake being preyed upon by an eagle to describe the fear that Kusuma feels (Triveni 1997d, 56) and elsewhere talks about the madness of an elephant that increases with noise to describe how Kusuma's hysteria increases with the crowd's provocation (ibid., 109).

Though we may rightly ask whether the description of hysterical behaviour is appropriate to the character represented, I suggest that it is not merely in the character of Kusuma that we see hysterical behaviour. It is also evident in the description of the stepmother—with her buck teeth, her dishevelled hair and her fiery green eyes, as well as in the way she mistreats Kusuma (ibid., 56). Even Sudha, a girl in the neighbourhood, is upon times hysterical. Sudha goes to

Kusuma's house to get a loan of sugar and is frightened by the sight of Kusuma (Triveni 1997d, 109). Then again the narrative makes a spectacle of Sudha's fear of the mere mention of Kusuma's mother's ghost. It suggests that Sudha's fears and wails would cause the very earth to shiver (ibid., 109). An instance of the 'bizarre' element entering the narrative is seen in Vani's *Chinnada Panjara* where the daughter shrieks in disgust when she sees her mother. If we examine Indira's *Gejje Pooje*, Chandri's friend who is studying psychology constantly tells her that she is mentally unstable. Interestingly then, there is a blurring of the distinction between the hysteric and the "normal" person.

Further, as I mentioned earlier, we need to read the excess as not merely applying to the character as much as driving the narrative. The hysterical excess is seen in the structure of the narrative—the repetitions of words, the flow of the narrative, almost like a rush of words that leap onto each other as they hasten forward. This is shown in a stark manner in the representation of the mental conflict that Rama experiences in Triveni's *Huuvu Hannu*. It is also shown in the mental conflict that Lalita, in Anupama's *Himada Hu*, experiences while wondering if she should divorce Shekhar since she feels constrained by the demands made on her as a *grihini* and because her husband and his family do not give her due recognition for being a successful lecturer. Thus the psychological mode of narrativising is not merely characteristic of what have been referred to as the psychological novels of Triveni. Though these novels seem to embody the excess in a spectacular manner since they revolve around a hysteric or psychotic

woman protagonist, I suggest that the excess is very much present in the romance novels of the second-generation women writers.

I argue that the narrative of hysterical excess constitutes an alternate Symbolic in excess of the modernist logic of these narratives. If we see these narratives as articulating a desire for modernity, with the writers speaking on behalf of the state in the language of the scientific rationality, the hysterical excess shows up the limits and failures of modernity. In explicating the notion of the Symbolic I would like to draw upon the interventions made by Luce Irigaray in relation to what she calls the Feminine Symbolic.

The Feminine Symbolic posited by Irigaray is a reformulation of Lacan's model of the Imaginary and Symbolic.[30] She deconstructs Lacan's concepts by stating that these are the Male Imaginary and the Male Symbolic. This does not mean that there is another Symbolic or Imaginary which already exists and is waiting to be discovered but is something to be arrived at and which lies in the interstices of the dominant Symbolic Order. The Feminine Symbolic is the magma or residue of the Symbolic that is unsymbolisable. She suggests that this residue is

[30] Elizabeth Grosz suggests that according to Lacan the Imaginary refers to the formation of the ego or the "I" and the vital role played by the child's identification with its own image in the mirror-stage. The Imaginary is the narcissistic structure of investments which transforms the image of otherness into a representation of the self. The Imaginary is "the world, the register, the dimension of images, conscious and unconscious, perceived or imagined. In this respect, the Imaginary is not the opposite of but belongs to reality. Together with the Symbolic and the Real, the Imaginary is one of the three orders regulating human biological, interpersonal and social life." The Symbolic, for Lacan, refers to the social and signifying order of culture that all beings must occupy in order to be a subject. One, it is governed according to the imperatives of paternal authority. Two, it refers to the order of language, and particularly to language considered as a rule-governed system of signification, organised with reference to the 'I', the speaking subject. The Symbolic is the order of representation (Grosz 1989, xviii-xxiii).

the necessary outside (within the existing Symbolic) that allows for any organisation of reality, whether linguistic, social or individual. It is the undifferentiated, unconscious outside from which identity emerges and which she identifies as the feminine (Whitford 1988). We should not read the residue itself as feminine as much as see it as gendered feminine.

The Feminine Symbolic might allow us to think about the uniqueness of the form of the romance novels, which can be located in the hysterical excess in the language that goes beyond the linear and the rational language of the developmental-modern. This is despite a novel like *Bekkina Kannu* that accounts for the hysterical behaviour and insanity of the woman protagonist by pointing out that it is not an arbitrary, idiosyncratic and irrational behaviour but one that is grounded in reason, however repressed it be in the unconscious of the protagonist. Triveni herself is avowedly working within a frame of rationality condemning superstitious beliefs. *Bekkina Kannu* explicitly talks about the underlying rationale for hysteria and appeals to the reader to view such cases from a scientific perspective. Hence the novel tries to show that Kusuma needs to be taken to a psychiatrist rather than an exorcist. However, the hysterical excess of the narrative overrides the scientific, rational explanation that the novel provides. If we look at the novels on conjugality, as I have mentioned earlier, they articulate the language of the developmental-modern and are located within a desire for modernity. However, the narrative interrupts this language through the element of 'hysterical excess'. Hence, this particular narrative that constitutes the Feminine Symbolic is irrespective of or even despite the content of the novel, which might seem within

the dominant Symbolic, for instance in the linear and rational language of the developmental-modern.

After discussing how the second-generation women writers produced a Kannada modernity from a gendered perspective, I would like to ask how the novelists articulated the question of caste. One of the criticisms made against these novelists has been that since most of them were brahmin, the nature of questions raised too was also brahmin-centric, revolving around largely 'domestic' issues (See Narayana 1997a). I would like to go back to the idea of the Female Symbolic to address the question of caste in relation to the romance novels. Though the novels weave narratives around brahmin women and portray their world and their dilemmas, some of the novels interestingly pose questions of the 'other' from within this narrative.

As I argued earlier, the narrative structure makes for the blurring of the binary between good femininity and bad femininity, what can be mapped onto an 'upper caste' respectable subject who represents the protagonist and a lower caste 'disreputable' subject who represents the 'other' within a conventional representative practice in the novel. Let us take a further look at the two instances of Triveni's *Huuvu Hannu* and Indira's *Gejje Pooje* where prostitutes are the main protagonists. I will compare these instances to the portrayal of prostitutes that widely circulated in the 1950s novels. A rather representative example can be found in the novel *Kabbinada Kage* (Iron Crow) that was written by the Pragathisheela writer, A. N. Krishna Rao (Aa. Na. Kru).

Kabbinada Kage revolves around a prostitute who is shown as sly and deceptive, and as one who does not give up her profession despite the good intentions of many male clients who offer to marry her. The novel is written in a mode to excite and indulge the male reader. Though Aa. Na. Kru's claim was that he was moving away from the 'conservatism' of the Navodaya writers to show the 'naked truths' of life, it is a partial view that merely reinforces stereotypes of the prostitute and reinstates a normative notion of an ideal femininity (Rao, K. 1960).[31] Triveni and Indira represent the prostitute very differently.

As we saw earlier the overt narrative logic of *Huuvu Hannu* and *Gejje Pooje* has to 'cast out' Rama and 'kill' Chandri as they are 'the other' of the *grihini*.[32] They only get into prostitution because of a compulsion: In *Huuvu Hannu* it is a financial necessity and in *Gejje Pooje* it is a case of mistaken identity where Chandri who is actually born of brahmin parents is orphaned and is brought up by a prostitute's family. The novels work within a dominant convention where only 'respectable' women are protagonists and a 'compulsion' is required to allow the respectable woman to enter the space of the other. However, in occupying that space there are moments when the 'other' raises questions—of selfhood, of dignity, respectability, exploitation, love and desire—that is normally not her privilege to ask. In an interesting section, Irigaray describes what it means to speak within the Feminine Symbolic. Irigaray points out:

[31] *Nagna Satya* (Naked Truth) was the title of one of his popular novels.
[32] So too the woman protagonist Bharati in Triveni's *Sothu Geddavalu* has to break down completely to atone for the one-time extra-marital sexual encounter that she has.

> The issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the subject or object but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself…which presupposes that women do not claim to be rivalling men in constructing a logic of the feminine that would still take an onto-theo-logic as its model, but that they are rather attempting to wrest this question away from the economy of the logos. They should not put it, then, in the form 'what is woman?' but rather, repeating/ interpreting the way in which, within discourse, the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject, they should signify that with respect to this logic a *disruptive excess* is possible on the feminine side. (Irigaray and Whitford 1991, 126)

Irigaray suggests that the Feminine Symbolic is a space that is precisely not oppositional to the male. Neither does it reduce difference to sameness but accounts for difference that does not make it exclusionary. I would like to add in the context of the question of caste, here analysed through the figure of the prostitute, that this difference is not merely a difference between men and women but also that among women. I am not suggesting that the question of caste is explained in an exhaustive manner through the analysis. I would like to stress that the caste markers of the women are not foregrounded as much is their gender, except through the making invisible of caste. Also, the secular language of these novelists would not have allowed for the foregrounding of caste, which would be seen as a backward and pre-modern notion that would have to be overcome within

modernity. However, what I have attempted to show is that the structure of these romance narratives does not validate a criticism of these novels as brahmin or upper caste-centric. Thus the notion of the Feminine Symbolic allows me to account for the form of the mid-century women's romances that blurs any normative positing of an ideal femininity and as I discussed earlier, contains a hysterical excess that exceeds the language of the developmental- modern. It is not invoked in the sense of a utopia but as delineating the limits of the dominant Symbolic, as embodied in the developmental-modern language of the state.

I have attempted to show in this chapter how women's romances of the 1950s-60s chalked out a Kannada modernity that was a two-pronged critique of a normative notion of *dharma* and a developmental-modern language. I will discuss in the next chapter the nature of a Kannada modernity constructed by women advice writers between the late 1950s and early 1980s.

Chapter 4

Fashioning the Scientific 'Self': Women Giving Advice, 1950s-1980s

This chapter will address how women's subjectivity within the conjugal space was fashioned in the advice writings on conjugality by women between the late 1950s and early 1980s. These writings are significant because there seems to be no comparable literature on the topic in terms of volume and popularity even by male writers. The publishing houses enabled better circulation of these texts through the publication of cheap paperbacks, as I have discussed in Chapter 2. *Kelu Kishori* (Listen, Girl), a book on sex education for teenage girls, for instance, was priced at two rupees. The advice writings also flourished after the mid-1960s, with the expansion of periodical publishing.[1] New modes of circulation came into being through the establishment of private circulating libraries and in these books being given as gifts to brides (Niranjana 1990). However, from the 1950s itself newspapers created a forum for such writings. The advice literature envisaged for itself the role of mediating between the state and its subjects. These writings interpellated the reader-subjects as citizens who had to be given a 'voice' within a democracy (The Kannada daily newspaper *Prajavani* which itself means 'Citizen's Voice' carried a popular column, 'Mahilavani' which means 'Women's Voice').

[1] A widely read magazine *Sudha* came into the market in the year 1965. By then another periodical *Prajamata* was in circulation and quite well known. Both these established themselves in the market for more than a decade subsequently until the publication of *Taranga* in the 1980s.

However, the notion of the citizen being invoked also has to be read in other ways. As Susie Tharu suggests, the authors writing immediately after independence represented an executive authority, speaking on behalf of the state. Hence, through the interpellation of subjects as citizens, the writings aimed to fashion the subjects into citizens in accordance with the logic of the state. This objective set the terms of the relationship between the writer and the reader-subject in the genre of advice writings by women.

The chapter will show how the advice writings constructed a Kannada modernity in the post-independence context. As I have suggested earlier, the narrative of conjugality in the advice writings has to be read as symbolic of the production of a modernity. Two important aspects of this modernity that are manifest in the writings are a) the representation of the notion of the *grihini*'s self within the frame of equality, and b) the scientific perspective from which the writings addressed the question of conjugality. These advice writings created a new subjectivity for the *grihini* that posited the notion of her 'self' or 'identity' as restructuring *dharma*, as we saw in Chapter 3 in relation to the women's novels. Though the notion of the 'self' was inaugurated in the early twentieth century writings, these writings represent the woman's self as laying claim to an equal status. The notions of self, equality and the emphasis on a scientific perspective were part of the developmental-modern language of the state.

I examine in this chapter the different positions from which the women writers speak in relation to the developmental-modern discourse and the notion of *dharma*, which together frame these writings. These will constitute my first two sections. In the section on the developmental-modern I will show in these writings the shaping of the 'self' of the *grihini*, drawing on the language of equality. However, the notion of 'self' was not always invoked within a liberal frame. The self variously negotiated the notion of *dharma*. The notion of equality is not only used to signify the status of the *grihini* and as governing the relationship between the couple but also governed the very form of these writings which positioned the reader on an equal plane with that of the writer. This is different from the early twentieth century writings by women, which inaugurated the modern language of selfhood but did not address the reader on an equal plane, and which was in the form of moral instruction rather than an experiential and conversational mode as in the later advice writings. I indicate the extent to which there was change in the form of address later in the chapter, through elaborating the instances of the writings of Pandita Ramabai and Anupama Niranjana.

The section on *dharma* tries to understand how the discourse of women's equality restructured the notion of *dharma*. The most significant shift from early twentieth century women's writing is the invocation of less normative notions of *dharma*. I explore in this section the different delineations of *dharma* in the advice writings through a comparison between two popular writers, Ma. Na. Murthy and

Anupama, the same writer whose novels I discussed in Chapter 3.[2] Since the notion of *dharma* frames these writings as much as the language of the developmental-modern, I would like to ask whether its presence alters our understanding of these writings as producing a modernity. I suggest that we need to understand the notion of *dharma* as not outside of the modern but as a part of it. However, I would like to ask how we understand the invocation of 'ancient texts'—both religious, such as the epics and the *Bhagavadgita*, and non-religious, such as the *Kama Sutra* and Sushruta's medical writings—in the arguments made for a scientific perspective in the advice writings. In the last section I try and understand women's writing in relation to a feminist discourse that was emerging during the 1970s, especially with respect to the question of marriage.

Through this chapter, I make frequent references to Anupama. This is because Anupama, who was a doctor by profession and a prolific writer, holds a unique position among women producing advice literature in Kannada. I study her work from the 1950s to the 1980s, since it demonstrates an interesting trajectory of advice writings by women covering the period I investigate. I discuss the shaping of the notion of *grihini* by analysing her writing vis-à-vis that of others, men like Ma. Na. Murthy and S. K. Ramachandra Rao, and women like Shantadevi Kanavi, M. K. Jayalakshmi, Sarojini Mahishi, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Shantadevi Malavada and Gita Kulkarni.

[2] I have retained the conventional usage in Kannada of names such as Ma. Na. Murthy and Du.

Though I focus primarily on the different positions from which writers speak in relation to the question of conjugality, I would like to mark some important dates in the history of prose writings by women. The beginnings of these writings can be traced to the women's columns in newspapers of the late 1950s ("Mahila Vani" or "Women's Voice" in *Prajavani*) and health-related columns which were not exclusively for women but became a feminised space ("Swasthya Samasye-Salahe" or "Health Problem-Advice" in *Prajavani*). Much of the debate in the 1950s-60s revolved around the issues of family planning and legislative reform that were programmes being introduced by the state.[3] We also begin to see writings on working women, love marriage and inter-caste marriage. These advice writings in newspapers became a significant genre by themselves in the 1970s, when they were put together as books. For instance, Anupama's advice writings in the column "Mahila Vani" (Women's Voice) in *Prajavani* in the mid 1960s were later compiled in the form of a book *Shubhakamane* (Best Wishes, 1973) along with the publication of other advice books for women such as *Vadhuvige Kivimathu* (Advice to the Bride, 1971).[4] The advice books for women were on the subjects of home science, cookery and health-related advice.

Saraswathi that do not use the English alphabet but the Kannada syllable for their initials.

[3] Beginning with Da. Kru. Bharadwaj's *Mitasantana* (Limited Children) in 1947, a discourse of family planning—including advertisements for contraceptive devices and of doctors who will provide advice on contraception, articles on over-population and short stories on family planning—is visible in the 1950s in Kannada newspapers like *Prajavani* and Kannada periodicals like *Prajamata*. There were also a number of articles on legislative reform (See Chattopadhay 1969).

Among the advice writings, the genre of health-related writings requires special mention. Though these writings were published in newspapers in the 1950s, focussing on women and children,[5] they became very popular during the 1970s.[6] Two of the main subjects of the health-related writings were sex and post-natal care. [7]

The Developmental-Modern

As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the central aspects of the modernising Karnataka state after independence was its programme of development. Satish Deshpande suggests that in the post-colonial nations like India, 'development' was not merely a set of economic policies or processes. It was an ideology that helped articulate a state and imagine a national collectivity (2003, 56).[8] In addition to this, as

[4] This was a time when 'popular education' was gaining importance. Publications like *Grihasaraswati Granthamale* brought out a series of books on 'Popular Education' aiming to educate 'the common people who are unable to go to college' (See Niranjana 1970b).

[5] Apart from the health-related columns for women there were articles giving advice in relation to children (See *Prajavani* 1956).

[6] Anupama's medical writings for instance sold even more than her novels (Niranjana 1990). This was a time when writings on popular science grew. See Karanth 1972 for an instance of articles that were talking about the need to spread popular science.

[7] Writings on child care started coming out in the late 1950s-1960s and continued to flourish later. Anupama's *Thayi Magu* (Mother-Child, 1971) and *Kempammana Magu* (Kempamma's Child, 1991) were very popular and influential in changing post-natal care practices. Anupama mentions an episode where a woman told her that she will provide post-natal care to her daughter according to Anupama's book and in jest added that Anupama would be responsible for the consequences (1990, 61). One of the early instances of the spread of popular sex education was in 1968 when a series of lectures was given by Anupama to students of National College, Basavanagudi, on being approached by their principal, H.Narasimhaiah, who had been part of the Indian nationalist movement, who felt that health education was important for students. He had organised a series on 'Niti mathu Arogya Shikshana' (Morality and Health Education) earlier in 1956. Anupama's lectures were later serialised in a Kannada magazine, *Karmaveera* and compiled as a book *Kelu Kishori* (1972) at a low price of Rs. 2 affordable even to students (Niranjana 1973b; 1990).

[8] Deshpande says, "In the third world context the idea of development is something more than just a set of economic policies or processes; it is one of the crucial mechanisms that enables a national collectivity to be imagined into existence. In the most general terms, development-as-ideology helps

I suggested in Chapter 1, in the context of Karnataka, the notion of development also helped envision a regional community (Thirumal and Smriti 2005, 139).

Scholars have pointed out that the nature of development, shaped by the bureaucracy, was such that the state saw itself as an important mediator (Kaviraj 1997; Deshpande 2003). Among the many issues it addressed, the women's issue was crucial to the state's vision of progress and its language of welfarism. Women were a significant category to be interpellated, both as an object of development and a subject who would participate in this vision. Two of the intensely implemented programmes by the state after independence were family planning and legislation around marriage. The legislations began with the Marriage and Divorce Act (1955) providing for divorce and banning polygamy, followed by the law giving property rights to women and allowing them to adopt children (1956) and the law against dowry (1961).

How do we understand women's advice writings in relation to the developmental-modern language of the state? How do we characterise the modernity of these writings? In addition to analysing the content, can we understand the construction of a modernity by these writers through an analysis of the form of the writings? Is there a difference in these writings from the state's developmental-

articulate state, nation and economy, and plays a crucial role in securing the coherence of the new post-colonial nations" (2003, 56).

modern discourse because of the authors' location as female subjects? While I explore the production of modernity in these writings, I ask whether there is a gap between the citizen and subject that we find in relation to the novels.

Before I respond to these questions, I would like to ask the question of how we should understand the nature of state intervention in implementing development programmes for women. One of the characteristics of the developmental state is its welfarism. Drawing on a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality, Susie Tharu projects welfarism as merely a means to legitimise and consolidate the state's own position. She points to the photographic realism mobilised by the American state to produce specific subjects as 'appropriate' or 'fit' subjects of welfarism "who will be all right with a little help" from the state (1998a, 228-229). Though this argument is an important corrective to an unqualified celebration of development, I would like to merely point to the need to characterise the welfarist language in a far more complex manner than that suggested by Tharu.[9]

What I would like to stress about the state's discourse of the developmental-modern in the context of the women's writings I examine, is the remarkable consensus about the desire for women's equality and selfhood that was created soon after independence. For instance, if we look at the debates in the daily newspaper *Prajavani* around the Marriage and Divorce Act, 1955, the newspaper itself saw the

legislation as a progressive measure.[10] In Vadabhumi (Ground of Debate), the newspaper's public forum that was created to discuss the legislation though there were a few letters that decried the legislation as a violation of *dharma* what is striking is that there were also a number of letters that supported the legislation as a move towards achieving women's equality and as recognising the woman as a 'human being', rather than as an 'object' or 'puppet' (Ramachandra 1955; Visveshwara 1955; Mrityunjaya 1955). This discourse of equality was enabled by a new framing of the wife as an important member of the family. Further, since the family was perceived as the foundation of a newly independent society, the happiness of the woman was seen as crucial to building that society. Thus *dampatya* or conjugality is not only central to practising *dharma* but also to thinking the nation, the region and their modernity. Since love and compatibility were what constituted marriage, divorce (between a loveless couple) was only seen as breaking a 'false bond' (Akar 1961; Kanti 1955).

How do we read women's writing in relation to the language of the developmental-modern? The women writers seem to construct a Kannada modernity that aligned with the state's language of the developmental-modern. We can see women writers emphasising the very issues of legislation and family planning. For

[9] In trying to understand the complex nature of the Indian welfare state, it would be necessary to especially study dalit critiques of modernity and the state, beginning with the writings of Ambedkar.

[10] Namirajamalla's article, "Vivaha Vichedaneya Parampare-Shasana" (Tradition-Law of Divorce) saw the law as a culmination of ancient practices and British law, thus a combination of *dharma* and modernity, the law posing no conflict to *dharma*. It saw divorce as a custom that is not alien since it has existed in many communities. The law was seen as progressive in fixing a custom which was otherwise heterogeneously followed in India (1955).

instance, Anupama says that a couple should adopt family planning because their first duty is to educate and take good care of their children in order that they become good citizens of the country. The writers mention that the establishment of an Indian republic was a historic landmark for women since their equality was proclaimed through a provision for "equal opportunity for all people to do all work without discrimination on the grounds of caste, creed, religion, woman or man" (Niranjana 1961).

The vocabulary of equality that is found in the legislations by the state is the very same vocabulary that the women writers too articulated. The legal provisions created a commonsense about the desirability of women's equality. The equal status shared by the woman and the man, along with notions of love and compatibility became central to the constitution of the couple. For instance, a short story by Gita Kulkarni called "Hosa Hennu, Hosa Gandu" (New Woman, New Man) heralds the new couple whose marriage is based on love and not on cruel customary practices such as dowry.[11] Interestingly, though the story is against dowry, it does not necessarily recognise the woman as an individual whose dignity should be respected. It suggests that the practice of giving dowry hurts and perhaps oppresses the father.

[11] The story is about a man who wants to take his fiancée out to Brindavan Gardens during Deepavali. He comes to the house of his future in-laws and tells them that he has come there with a desire. When the parents start getting worried about how to mobilise money and gifts to be given to the future son-in-law, the daughter tells them what her fiancé really wants. The fiancé mentions how his sister's husband by demanding money from his father for his future education had hurt his father. The father had then told his son to just bring home a wife; if luck shines on him, he'll make a fortune. Listening to this, the girl's father is pleased and asks his daughter's fiancé to take her to Brindavan Gardens. He

Hence the narrative draws on the developmental discourse of equality that underpins the anti-dowry act but departs from the liberal frame in its representation of the problem of dowry. This mode of celebrating conjugality as a relationship of love and companionship is similar to the imaging of the couple in the Navodaya (New Dawn) poetry of the 1930s-40s, as I mentioned in Chapter 3.[12] With independence, along with the notion of love and companionship, the notion of the woman's equal status with the man was stressed, hence making conjugality a relationship between equals.

Central to the understanding of the modernity of these women's writings is the production of the woman's 'self'. Let us examine this production in relation to two important issues, that of the working woman, and that of inter-caste marriage which came up for extensive discussion in the advice writings.

The advice writings provided legitimacy for women to work outside of the home (See Niranjana 1961; Kanavi 1961; Rama Rao 1972). They articulated a notion of a 'self' in discussing the working woman. The notion of self drew on the language of development of society to negotiate her *dharma* or duty as a *grihini*. The writings argued that women need to work outside the house in order to develop society (Sheshadri 1953; Kanavi 1961).[13] This notion of self was variously posited in relation

tells his wife, "They are today's [people]. Their thoughts are different. Ours different…. The new woman and the new man have begun their journey, with new enthusiasm" (Kulkarni 1958).

[12] See Chapter 3, note 14.

[13] An early article appeals to how men should not be suspicious of wives since there are occasions now when she will have to work alongside men for the betterment of society (Sheshadri 1953). In another article Kanavi says that people think women who go outside of the home cannot take care of the home.

to the family, sometimes in opposition to it but also within it. Some of the writers, for instance, ask the woman to ensure that she fulfils her duty as a *grihini* (Niranjana 1971a).[14] However, there were writings recommending that men help in housework to relieve women of the stress of working both outside and inside the home (Nayak 1961; "Kamadhenu" 1969).[15] For instance, a recipe book *Rasapaka* (Delicious Food) by Shantadevi Malavada, which is part of a two volume series, *Vadhuvige Udugore* (Gift to the Bride), explains how working women today should convince their in-laws that they are unable to prepare a variety of sweets during festivals since they are pressed for time. She suggests that women be unapologetic and confident in articulating their needs and compulsions (1980).

The notion of a working woman was, interestingly, not pitted against that of a housewife. What was emphasised in the latter too was the need to construct a 'self'. This self was sought to be shaped in many ways: through the woman not wasting time in gossip, but instead educating herself by reading the newspapers; through being able

But a mother should know how to bring up children who can contribute to the nation's progress. Housewives should join women's organisations where they can meet women from other regions and learn cooking, stitching and embroidery from them. They should find smart ways of appeasing their mothers-in-law by sometimes taking the latter to the meetings. Any husband who finds his wife not wasting money on fashion but learning something for their children's sake will not complain. Thus she can gain knowledge to run her home well and do service to society (1961).

[14] Anupama says that the working woman should come home before the husband gets home, finish work and look good in order to receive the husband. She asks women not to giggle with male colleagues. It is important that women have freedom but they should not misuse it. Women should remember that Indian women are respected and they should safeguard that respect even as working women (Niranjana 1971a, 113). Elsewhere she says, as an educated girl and working outside before marriage, you might find it difficult to just stay at home. However, if the family does not agree, don't insist on working outside. Only if you have procured a degree in engineering, medicine or law, then ensure that you work but negotiate this aspect before your marriage (ibid., 109).

to conduct intelligent conversation and carry herself with confidence; and through creating a space for herself in the house where she can pursue a hobby or even just relax (Rajashekhar 1961).[16]

If the notion of 'self' was often discussed in relation to both, the housewife and the working woman, by the 1980s there was a change in the perspective of writers like Anupama, who were by this time claiming a feminist position, where this notion of 'self' was to be exclusively located in working outside and wherein housework was seen as drudgery. In one of her controversial articles, she argues that a working woman's guilt that she is neglecting her home is unnecessary since household work is not that important. There were letters to the editor both passionately supporting and questioning Anupama's dismissal of housework (Niranjana 1985).[17] These sorts of vehement reactions were produced in the context

[15] Nayak argues that by now it has been proved wrong that women cannot manage both home and outside work. But in order to help her out, men should give equal support in running the family by lending a hand in housework (1961).

[16] In an article Rajashekhar says that learning an art will add colour to the woman's life. So even with the limitations of time, money and having to take care of the husband and family, a woman should do something. She can even be creative through doing up her house (1961).

[17] Some of the responses to Anupama's article that were published were as follows (*Sudha* 1985):

a) "Ending mental dilemmas"—"Engaging myself in art, literature and work, I used to feel guilty about neglecting my household duties. But your piece was very encouraging. When I read your words, 'Household work is not a job; do not give much importance to it', I was extremely happy" (Tarangini, Tumkur).

b) "Today's youth are caught between tradition and modernity. So Anupama Niranjana's wish will take a long time to be fulfilled" (Shailaja Banakara, Ranebennur).

c) "I was surprised to read your article. Is there no worth for an educated but unemployed woman? It is important to be economically independent. But in today's situation how many can get jobs? It is not right to abuse them and hurt their feelings. Instead we should give advice on how educated women in the village can become economically independent" (Vanaja V. Rao, Karkala, Da. Ka.).

d) "How many have the economic means to become proficient in education, sports and arts? Aren't putting *rangoli*, cooking and embroidery also forms of art?" (C.R. Usha, Chickballapura).

of a visible feminist discourse in the 1980s and point to the importance that this notion of 'self' had gained by this time. Though the notion of self was created in the context of a colonial modernity (See *Mahilasakhi* 1917; *Mahilasakhi* 1919), the mid-century women writers foregrounded the notion of selfhood or *thannathana* in their writings (Niranjana 1990, 32 and 52).

The other question around which the notion of a 'self' came to be discussed was love marriage and inter-caste marriage. This had become an issue in the 1950s within a modern vision where the individual became more important than the identities of caste and religion in the choice of partners, the notion of 'choice' itself, that was inaugurated in the early 20th century, by now becoming an accepted, in fact a desirable component in marriage.[18] Many writers often spoke about love and inter-caste marriage almost interchangeably (See, for instance, Niranjana 1971a). This is the position of intellectuals like Poornachandra Tejaswi (1963), Shivarama Karanth (1972b) and Anupama Niranjana (1971a) who advocated such marriages as a marker of progress and development.[19] However, unlike both Tejaswi and Karanth, Anupama provides an experiential perspective where she points to the need for the couple to have complete understanding and tolerance for each other's faiths and customs.

e) "To think that a housewife is stupid (*muudevi*) is wrong. If cooking and serving lowers ones status, what about men who cook and serve in functions? To think that all housewives fear their husbands, parents-in-law and children is wrong" (Sudha V. Rao, Secunderabad).

[18] For an early articulation of the issue see Tejaswi 1963.

[19] A writer like Karanth laments that the increasing number of inter-caste marriages are not because of a pro-active need to build an egalitarian society but because of men and women staying in towns and cities away from their homes (1972b). Anupama also mentions how inter-caste marriages are more prevalent now with women going to college and working in factories and offices (1971a).

However, the troubled positioning of the women's 'self' can be seen when Anupama asks the woman to bear the responsibility of making the marriage successful in order to realise the modern vision: "Cook meat for your husband. As a woman you have to sacrifice (Niranjana 1971a, 100)" or "In patience and tolerance you are mother earth" (ibid., 102).

Countering the above argument is that posed by a writer like Ma. Na. Murthy who was the assistant editor of the periodical *Prajamata* and whose column, 'Dampatya Samasye' (Marital Problems) in the same periodical was very popular.[20] He articulated a need to accept practices such as inter-caste marriage and love marriage, along with registered marriage. [21] However, he argued against those who supported these notions and practices on the grounds that they would help attain a just society or on the basis of asserting a person's individuality and choice.[22] He argued in favour of these practices as long as the man and woman knew each other well and there was parental consent.[23] Even Anupama would recommend seeking the approval of parents, even while positing a larger socialist ideal that argued that love marriages through a foregrounding of the 'individual' rather than status markers such as 'caste'

[20] The *Dampatya Samasye* column was started in 1974 and continued till the 1990s. The popularity of this column and his other column, *Gupta Samalochane* (Secret Advice) is documented in an article written in memory of Ma. Na. Murthy (*Prajamata* 1977).
[21] Registered marriage is a form of marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 that allowed the state to authorise marriages. The significance of such a marriage was that it allowed people of different castes and religious communities to marry one another.
[22] Ma. Na. Murthy states that the reform rhetoric is meaningless and sharply criticises people who posit women's freedom and 'self' in arguing for love and inter-caste marriage as opposed to marriages being arranged by the parents.
[23] This is the predominant position of many writers. An article in *Sudha* discussing the pros and cons of love marriage ended by saying it is essential to have the parents' blessing (Usha 1972).

will help build a casteless society.[24] Though love marriages could still preserve caste-class endogamy, the assumption here is that in such marriages, what is foregrounded is the 'individual' rather than his or her caste status.

In the *Prajamata* column after 1977, when Murthy passed away, we see a different viewpoint emerging. This stance emphasised that love marriage and inter-caste marriage are revolutionary moves that have to be supported. We need to understand the shift as arising not because a different person was writing the column in the late 1970s but because by then there were emerging social movements, led by women and dalits, that were articulating the need for a revolution.[25]

It is not as though the positions of Karanth, Tejaswi and Anupama which foreground the importance of the individual rather than that of caste and religion would support an opposition between the individual and society/law/religion. They would very much locate this individual within society. As we will see in the discussion of *dharma* later, for Karanth the individual is bound by an ethic.

The production of the notion of 'self' in the 1950s-80s advice writings, as distinct from the earlier ones, was framed within the language of 'equality' and within an expressed desire to be modern. Though the discourse of modernity emerged in the

[24] Anupama says that a man and woman who belong to different castes should go ahead with a marriage as long as they have the strength to counter society's cruel remarks (Niranjana 1971a, 99).
[25] For instance, this vocabulary is manifest in "Yuvajanarige Yava Dari?" (Where are the Youth Heading?) (Readers' Forum 1979).

context of colonialism with questions of choice and compatibility being raised in the writings in the 1920s, as in the journal *Mahilasakhi* (1917; 1918), these writings called for an incorporation of modern values within the frame of *dharma* and were still premised on the notion of an unequal man-woman relationship in marriage.

The advice book, *Stridharma Niti* (Morals for Women) by the renowned social reformer Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922)[26] that were extensively translated from Marathi into Kannada, for instance in the journal *Hitabodhini* (1886), and the well known lyric *Hadibadeya Dharma* (Morals for a Lady), which was reproduced as a lesson in a primary school Kannada textbook (Honnamma 1919), explicated the duties of a wife within the frame of *dharma* on the premise that the man was stronger than and the protector of the woman. Ramabai in *Stridharma Niti* introduces modern notions such as the importance of love in marriage. She advises the woman to gain the love and goodwill of the husband through appropriate behaviour instead of following superstitious beliefs such as going to a man practising black magic (*mantravadi*). She asks the woman to follow the path of *dharma*. The husband is seen as embodying the qualities of a teacher, father, mother and friend in showing the right path, giving advice and offering his love. The wife is asked to love and be devoted to her husband in order to become an exemplary woman like Sita or Savitri, who are characters in Hindu epics known for their *pativratya* (loyalty to the husband). What

[26] Pandita Ramabai started the first widows' home in Maharashtra called 'Sharada Sadan' and another called 'Mukti' where women of all castes stayed together, an unusual feature for the time. Born in a brahmin family, her marriage to a *shudra* and further her conversion to Christianity caused a furore and antagonised male social reformers in the late nineteenth century context of Hindu revivalism.

marks the prose writings by women after the 1950s is the beginning of the framing of conjugality as a relationship between equals and the stated desire to become modern.

Not only was the concept of equality articulated to emphasise the woman's equal status and to talk about conjugality as a relationship between equals, it also governed the relationship that the writer set up between herself and the reader. This can be seen in the form of women's writings, which was conversational, as though written by an older sister or friend. They use frequent anecdotes, draw on experiences of the authors and their acquaintances, pose questions and answer them,[27] put forward ways of thinking on a particular issue and then proceed to further or counter them,[28] and thus build a rapport with the readers.[29] The language of these writings was close to spoken language, with a few English words which were in currency or were beginning to come into usage.[30] This is especially true of Anupama whose medical writings introduced scientific facts and ideas in an easily understandable fashion.

The structure of address, which constitutes the form of these writings, is not to be read as trivial. I suggest that this form, as much as the content of the advice books

[27] For instance, Anupama would ask: "What does menstruation mean?" (Niranjana, 1973a, 22).
[28] Anupama would proceed to answer the question: "It is a practice that elders tell young children, 'The crow has touched her. That is why she is sitting away from the rest of us'" (ibid.). Anupama is referring to the practice in some households of women sitting in a corner of a house or outside of the house during their periods. Others do not touch them during this time and need to have a bath if they do.
[29] "Didn't you feel the same way about the person who came to see you?" (ibid., 37).
[30] "Idenamma, madve goththadamele iddakkiddahage seriousaagbittiddi" ("How come, you have suddenly turned serious after your marriage has been fixed") (Niranjana 1971a, 10) or "Naanu avalu onde colleginalli odhidhvi. Onde saari degree thakondvi. Avaladrushta nodi. Doctor ganda sikkiddane.

indicated a new positioning of the woman reader as an equal. This is different from Pandita Ramabai's writings of the early twentieth century, for instance, which did not address the woman as sharing an equal status with the man or the writer. Though her writings emphasised the notion of a companionate marriage, it did not foreground the woman's 'self'. It still spoke about the woman as dependent on the man. The concern for the woman was articulated, for instance, in asking men to be kind to their wives (See Ramabai 1886). Further, her mode of writing was in the genre of moral education. Even while granting that the post-1950s women writers used a language that was democratic in addressing the reader as an equal, we need to keep in mind that the language was double-edged in also being written within a particular agenda of fashioning the reader-subject in accordance with the state's idea of development.

Though women writing advice literature were articulating the state's language of the developmental-modern, they occasionally speak a different language. We see women writers asking questions about development, raising doubts about its effectiveness and subverting the language of development to speak about women's needs. If we look at the issue of family planning, women writers were asking questions about how contraception might affect women, what form of contraception might be best suited for them, and encouraging men to take up vasectomy. For instance, Anupama provides information to her readers about the harmful side effects of specific contraceptive pills in her health-related column, "Swasthya Samasye-

Nannadrushta kettaddu." ("She and I studied in the same college. Procured our degree at the same

Salahe" (Health Problem-Advice) (Niranjana 1965a). Elsewhere, speaking about the legislation against dowry, Anupama mentions how instead of dowry, people now take twice as much in the name of 'paying respect' to one's guests and others (*paropachara*) (Niranjana 1961). In her book *Dampatya Deepike* (Conjugality Manual) Anupama gives an interesting twist to the state's discourse of population control by introducing the notion of women's sexual pleasure as a means to enhance the couple's sexual life while talking about birth control and family planning. These articulations have to be seen only as subversions within the statist articulation of the developmental-modern without disrupting the language itself.

In the next section I analyse how male and female authors articulate the notion of *dharma* in their writings. I ask whether the presence of this notion or the constant invocation of 'ancient' religious and non-religious texts while making their argument mark the failure of the developmental-modern language of these writings.

Dharma

The advice writings, like the novels, show that in discussing the new *grihini* the notion of *dharma* is just as important as the language of the developmental-modern. I would like to note that the notion of *dharma* is not used in a normative

time. See her luck. She got a doctor for a husband. My luck is bad") (Niranjana 1971a, 12).

sense but gets debated and interrogated in the discussions around the *grihini* and *dampatya*.

One of the fundamental questions for many writers was how to articulate the notion of women's equality, which was gaining importance, in relation to marriage and *dampatya* that was primarily seen as embedded in *dharma*. The writers answer this question in different ways that I will elaborate below.

S. K. Ramachandra Rao, a well-known journalist and philosopher, writing in a special issue of the periodical *Sudha*, suggests that *dharma* or religion governs conjugality (1973).[31] He views conjugality as possessing a spiritual content which is beyond the law. Thus, legal provisions should only aid and not counter this sacredness of conjugality. But he argues against any distinction made between men and women in terms of the specific roles and responsibilities assigned to them within the *dharma*.[32] Instead he asserts the equal status of the two individuals, however without giving significance to their gendered location.[33]

[31] For Rao, marriage is a natural and inevitable part of society. Instances are when he says that one cannot rule out the possibility that even non human beings have such a system, thereby assuming that all human beings do and when he asks whether there is place for anyone outside of marriage in society. Divorce, though legal is not desirable. Since the natural state of man is to be married, divorce is an option only when someone wants to remarry. Interestingly, Ramachandra Rao does not mention the word divorce at all. Instead he only talks about remarriage. He suggests that conflict in marriage is because of boredom or difference in interests of the couple. This has to be overcome by both husband and wife who have to learn to adjust to each other (1973, 92).

[32] Rao says, "Today the man might have to do housework or the woman might have to go out of the home to work (ibid., 95)."

[33] "Men have desires and problems…so too do women", says Rao. Even if he perceives inequality, it does not become a basis for an argument. For instance, he says that both men and women are equally attached to their in-laws families but because of social structuring the woman might have to bear more

A different perspective can be seen in an article written by Pandarinathacharya Galagali in a special issue of the newspaper *Prajavani* (1967). Galagali also sees conjugality as governed by *dharma*, *dharma* here seen as a religious ideal. However, Galagali uncritically celebrates *dharma* and suggests that notions of equality existed in the past and that we need to retrieve this glorious past. He gives instances of various women in mythology in order to show how they were in fact equals in relation to their husbands (Galagali 1967, 127). Galagali uses modern notions of agency and voice to perceive these women in the past as individuals, even talking about the sacrifices they have made for their husband's achievements as willed or chosen by them. This is unlike Ramachandra Rao who suggests that we need to re-formulate a *dharma* that does not recognise the wife as an individual and perceives her as only fit to run the home. However, both Ramachandra Rao and Galagali argue for women's equal status with men. If for Ramachandra Rao the conflict between equality and *dharma* is resolved through an incorporation of equality within *dharma*, for Galagali *dharma* contains within itself the values of modernity such as equality and individuality. Though there is a difference between the two positions, both speak from the vantage point of *dharma*.

Another position that is located in *dharma* but is very different from the earlier two is represented by Shivarama Karanth, a renowned writer and intellectual

responsibilities. However, he does not follow it up. Rao seems to suggest that men and women are born equal. However, he sees this natural state as corrupted because of socialization and suggests that we need to outgrow this socialisation in order to reach that state (ibid., 92).

who frequently wrote on social issues. He sees legislation such as that on divorce as recognising the fractures that are inherent in marriage (1972a). Thus for Karanth, a law promoting women's equality provides a solution that is absent within the frame of *dharma* (as religion). However the legislation does not solve the inherent problem in marriage, which is the conflict between a religious frame of marriage as an 'eternal bond' and a historical reality where that ideal is not practised. Thus, neither religious sanctions that govern Indian society nor legal dictates can actually solve the real problem that is at the root of marriage. The solution lies in the *dharma* practised by individuals, *dharma* not in terms of a fixed religious notion but in terms of an individual ethic. As I mentioned earlier in the context of love-marriage and inter-caste marriage debates, Karanth does not pose the notion of the 'individual' as necessarily in opposition to any structure within which he is placed. He sees the individual as not entirely contained within a normative law or *dharma* (religion). However, he sees the individual as ideally bound by *dharma*, as an ethic (1972a). Thus, Karanth argues for a notion of *dharma* that is not normative. Writing in 1960 when the impact of the divorce law had not fully faded away, Karanth seems to be responding to anxieties about the breakdown of *dharma* (as religion) and whether women might become 'loose' (*svechches*). However, his concern is not how men and women are differently placed under the religious bind of marriage as an eternal bond. Also, his invocation of *dharma* (as ethic) applies to both men and women.

This notion of *dharma* as an individual ethic is also invoked in the debate around the legislation on divorce that appeared in *Prajavani* where some readers arguing for the legislation state that the law would not be detrimental if it is used in moderation and with responsibility (*nishte*). Thus the law was seen not as conflicting with *dharma* but as being part of a changing ethic of the times (*kala dharma*) (Radhakrishna 1955; Sheshadri 1955).

What is different about women's writing is the raising of the question of women's subjectivity within conjugality in relation to notions of *stridharma* (ethics for the woman). We find in these writings multiple invocations of *stridharma* that range from being a normative notion to a less normative concept. This range of invocations has to be taken into account in thinking about the production of a modernity by the women's advice writings. On the one hand the women's writings after the 1950s till the 1970s can be seen as asserting a normative notion of *stridharma*. This criticism would be similar to dominant feminist critiques of the women's romance novels, which I mentioned in Chapter 3, that suggest that the latter reinforce patriarchal values. We see, for instance, Anupama's emphasis on marriage as the primary concern for the woman in her book *Vadhuvige Kivimathu* (Advice to the Bride) where she addresses an educated woman reader who is about to get married or is just married but talks about how the woman should use this education to build a successful marriage. The book underscores the need for women to adjust and sacrifice for her husband's family: "Remember you do not marry only your husband

but another family" (Niranjana 1971a, 10), "Use the knowledge of elders to learn housekeeping" (ibid., 13-14) and "Today girls might be egoistic and would desire to make a separate house with their husbands" (ibid., 55).

The need to protect something called an Indian 'culture' is seen in Anupama's early article where she is against the legalisation of abortion on the grounds that it is against our cultural values (Niranjana 1965b).[34] The woman is sometimes made to bear the responsibility of Indian 'tradition' and is asked to behave in a 'respectable' manner: "Women should remember that Indian women are treated with respect and they should behave in a manner that will safeguard that respect, even as working women" (Niranjana 1971a, 113).

Anupama's *Dampatya Deepike* (Conjugality Manual) seems to reinforce conventional notions of masculinity and femininity when she speaks about them as 'natural'. The author describes a woman in love as feeling shy and wanting her husband to fulfill her desires, just as the man will feel the need to protect his wife (Niranjana 1973a, 38). She also describes the sperm as aggressive and active just like the man and the egg as passive just like the woman (ibid., 53).

[34] In a later book *Dampatya Deepike*, she shifts her position. Though she is still against abortion on grounds that it will affect women's physical and mental health, she is for the abortion law since she suggests that women will otherwise get it done through unhealthy means (1973a, 104).

However, if we read Anupama's advice writings carefully, we will find that the invocation of ideal notions of femininity and *stridharma* are undercut by other statements that do not carry a normative meaning. There are invocations of *dharma* which suggest that the roles of a wife and daughter-in-law are not sacrosanct but have to be performed in order to keep the parents-in-law happy. Anupama asks the woman to ignore her mother-in-law's criticism about her 'fashion' (ibid., 33), to be clever in appeasing the mother-in-law by seemingly asking her advice on issues such as having to go to a film with her husband (ibid., 30) and even suggests that the couple move out of the house if it is very torturous to live with the parents-in-law (ibid., 55). Thus the normative invocation of femininity and *dharma* are offset by less normative invocations of the same. As I argued in relation to the novels, I would like to suggest that in the advice writings by women the blurring of normative notions of femininity and *dharma* is one of the important aspects of their construction of a Kannada modernity.

I compare Anupama's position with that of Ma. Na. Murthy's in his column, 'Dampatya Samasye' in *Prajamata* in order to understand the different delineations of *dharma* that can be found in the 1970s advice writings. I will also place these advice writers vis-à-vis the readers who were either asking queries or responding to them.

The column ‘Dampatya Samasye’ carried letters around the subjects of love marriage, divorce, sex and relationships outside of marriage. Though both men and women sought advice in this column it increasingly became a feminised space. The women who were seeking advice were mostly young, aged between twenty and twenty-five years, either married or were about to get married. The letters were usually long and dramatic, using metaphors from literature, the person writing usually stating that she was ‘on the verge of committing suicide’. The mode of writing was from a younger sister to an older brother asking for advice. The letters were responded to by Murthy till 1977 when he passed away. After 1977, *Prajamata* started carrying editorial comments along with the letters on questions such as domestic violence and bigamy, which were stated to be important issues raised by many of the readers’ letters. These comments articulated a notion of women’s equality that could not be found in Murthy’s writing. This shift, as I mentioned before, has to be understood as arising because of an emergent but visible discourse of women’s issues in India in relation to questions of domestic violence and patriarchy.

The letters can be classified according to the nature of advice sought. One, which sought information on divorce procedures, procedures of registered marriage, and matters of sex. The second, which comprised the bulk of the letters from women, expressed dilemmas over whether the woman was doing the right thing or not according to *dharma* with regard to relationships outside marriage and sexual

practices (such as masturbation), and their anxiety as to whether these will affect their married life. In response to legitimate doubts about whether these letters were 'real', I would like to suggest that even if they were not, what I am interested in is the public discourse around conjugality created by the column and the particular invocation of the notion of *dharma* by Murthy. I take up the contentious question of sexuality in order to analyse the different invocations of the notion of *dharma* by Murthy, Anupama and the 'readers' of the "Dampatya Samasye" column.

Writers like Murthy wrote within a moral frame which made clear distinctions between what was right and what was wrong. For instance, in relation to a query from a wife complaining about the husband who performs sex using postures of various animals such as cow and dog, Murthy merely states that it is obscene (Murthy 1977). Anupama too condemns such an act but in a different manner. For instance, while talking about ways to derive sexual pleasure, she says that there is nothing wrong about the ways in which you derive it as long as the man does not hurt the woman. She even talks about how if a woman is not satisfied after intercourse, the man should provide clitoral stimulation to bring her to orgasm. Responding to the question if this is immoral (*apachara*) she says, "Whatever a husband and wife do to get happiness is not wrong. What is important is satisfaction for both. The rest is unimportant" (Niranjana 1973a, 115).

Like many other women writers, Anupama talks about the importance of sex for the woman's physical and mental happiness. She says that if the woman's sexual desire is not satisfied, she will suffer horrifying mental consequences such as tiredness, anger and depression (1973a, 81). Anupama has a chapter on the different exercises that men and women can perform in order to gain sexual energy and strength. This shows a very different perspective from that of Murthy who thought that sex in marriage was being given too much of importance. In response to a woman who feels dissatisfied with her sex-life in marriage but is otherwise happy, Murthy says that she should not worry too much about sex: "Sexual energies differ from person to person and you have to adjust to that. In a way it is good to have moderation (*miti*) when it comes to sexuality" (Murthy 1975). Murthy draws on the language of *dharma* while invoking the notion of *miti* which is seen as a desirable quality in ones behaviour, including sexual behaviour. Sex is not for pleasure but for reproduction. Sexual pleasure is seen only as instrumental, rather than essential to marriage. Pleasure is then seen as an excess (as opposed to *miti*), a new-found obsession in our culture. In contrast, Anupama does not perceive sex as merely a duty but also a way of bringing the couple together.

Anupama was not unique in stating the importance of sex in marriage. Around the 1970s, there were a number of articles in *Prajamata* that make a similar argument (See "Kaveri" 1972; Shakuntala 1972). This is a move away from the nationalist framing of the sexuality question in the 1950s in relation to family planning. There

seems to be a separation of sex from reproduction in these writings. This separation marks a departure from both normative tradition and nationalist framings, where the basis for sex is only reproduction, not pleasure. These writings draw on Western psychology and studies and theories of sexuality from the West. All underscore the importance of marriage as the basis for society. Further, a healthy sexual relationship between husband and wife is seen as integral to marriage. This argument largely arises from a perspective which rests faith in science as a solution to the problems in our society and as necessary for its progress and development. The scientific framing of sexuality allowed for not only new articulations around it but also a reformulation of notions of *dharma*.

Before I make a comparison between the advice writings and novels by women, I would like to put forward the standpoints in relation to *dharma* and the law that emerge in some of the readers' letters in the *Dampatya Samasye* column and the *Prajavani* debate around the Marriage and Divorce Act, 1955.

Readers too draw on the developmental-modern language of the state to negotiate the question of marriage in different ways. In the debate around the divorce act that appeared in the newspaper *Prajavani*, some of the readers who were against divorce instead suggest different ways of ensuring a better marriage, such as permitting the couple to spend time together and understand each other before

marriage and allowing for love marriages and inter-caste marriages (Shachi 1955; Deshi 1955).

Some of the criticisms of the divorce law obviously came from the standpoint that it was against *dharma* (Sunderraj 1955; Bhadran 1955; Chennabasappa 1955). However, the critique was sometimes made from the stance that it was inappropriate to our social context. For example, as against people who were against the law because it would lead to *svechchachara* (excess/immoral freedom), there were doubts raised about the law for other reasons. Readers asked whether the social context we live in would allow women to resort to the law. For instance, one of the readers asked what will happen to divorced women, given the present cultural context and suggested that a clause accompany the law to the effect that divorced men should only marry divorced women (Ratna 1955). Another reader asked whether illiterate women and rural men and women could understand the language of the law at all (Swati 1955).

In the "Dampatya Samasye" column, the invocation of *dharma* and the law is less normative by the readers than by Ma.Na.Murthy. For instance, a married woman who raises questions in relation to a physical relationship she is in with another man states that she is in it not because she is in love but because the man wanted such a relationship. She says that since her husband is a nice person, she wants to ensure that her husband or she herself will not catch any disease. She does not seem particularly

worried about whether she is doing the right thing in having another relationship. The respondent, however, raises an alarm over the questionable nature of such a relationship both in terms of the law and within *dharma*. I am not suggesting that the readers do not subscribe to the law or *dharma* since they do invoke it on occasion, as we saw in relation to the debate around the divorce law. However, in the instance of the woman discussing her relationship outside of marriage, a different relationship to *dharma* and the law can be seen where neither become a frame of reference. If the notion of *dharma* hovers in her wanting to ensure that her husband should not suffer, it is in the form of an ethic of responsibility that she feels towards him.

Returning to the question of women's writings, I would like to ask whether there was a critique of modernity that is manifest in these writings. There were doubts raised by women writers on the grounds of the cultural context in which we live. M. K. Jayalakshmi, a well-known writer, emphasises the significance of family planning but questions its mode of intervention within our cultural context, asking whether it should be implemented as a public programme or a personal concern (1953). The novelist Vani raises questions about the effectiveness of the divorce law in providing solutions to women given our cultural context (1958, 3). Though these statements raise doubts about the developmental-modern discourse of the state, they do not adequately constitute a critique of modernity. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, this is because the doubts about whether our cultural context will permit an effective implementation of a modernity has been raised by the state itself. Likewise, the mere

presence of the notion of *dharma* does not disrupt the modern language of the advice writings. In the context of a contradictory modernity that characterises the post-colonial state where there is an uneven development of capitalism, the invocation of *dharma* is a part of the dynamic of the confrontation between *dharma* and modernity that is played out in cultural texts, especially in relation to the women's question. The invocation is contained within the modernist language of the state.

If the mere presence of *dharma* does not indicate a departure from modernity, how do we understand women advice writers' locating modern notions and a science in ancient religious and non-religious texts? For instance, while arguing for the importance of sex in marriage, Anupama suggests that *Kama Sutra* was the first book on sexual science (*dampatya vignana*) in the past:

> The importance that was given to sex by our ancestors was for the good of both individuals and society. If life has to be beautiful, they believed that domestic life, which constitutes the basis of society, had to be happy.
>
> Research has revealed that even before 384 B.C. Kapila Maharshi has studied the development of the foetus. There is scientific data on the formation of an embryo in *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavadgita*.

> "During intercourse or after, the sperm unites with the egg. Only one sperm can unite with the egg."
>
> This is mentioned in the *Bhagavadgita*.
>
> By fourth century A.D., a saint called Vatsyayana wrote a book called *Kamasutra*. This work can be seen as the first book on sexual science in the whole world. (Niranjana 1973a, 5-6)

Likewise, Anupama suggests that the Hindu *dharma shastras* talk about how the couple should attain the goals of not only *dharma* and *moksha* (salvation) but also of *artha* (wealth) and *kama* (sex) (ibid., 5). While talking about the minimum age for marriage, she says that a medical expert from olden times Sushruta says that twenty-one years is appropriate for the man and sixteen years for the woman. She suggests that men should test and cure themselves of sexual problems before they get married, arguing how even in ancient times this was the practice (ibid., 9). Thus, Anupama calls upon texts from the past as an authority whenever she has to introduce a new idea. How do we understand the mention of such texts in relation to the scientific language of her writings and her argument for a scientific perspective on marriage and conjugal practices? Does this constitute a critique of modernity?

Historian Gyan Prakash talks about science as symbolising the legitimising sign of rationality and progress and as a sign of Indian modernity (1999). He suggests that the process by which science gains legitimacy in a post-colonial context like

India entails a necessary undoing of the science-magic opposition. Science has to transform itself into magic in order to establish its authority in the Indian context. This, says Prakash, marks the failure of modernity in that modernity has to travel as magic, the very object that it is trying to displace. The question before us is whether the use of ancient religious and non-religious texts by Anupama mark such a failure of modernity.

Let us look at the different kinds of evidence that Anupama draws upon to build her argument. As should be expected Anupama draws on scientific research. She invokes for instance Havelock Ellis, the famous sexologist, who said that along with sexual compatibility there should be other common interests and desires to make a marriage strong (Niranjana 1973a, 3). As we saw above, Anupama also uses texts from the past as evidence. Thirdly, she mentions common cultural practices. For instance, she states, "there is a practice before the first night that the bride's aunt usually advises the bride not to protest against anything that the husband says and to listen to him. However, the aunt does not give information to the bride about how to have intercourse. Because of the lack of knowledge the bride finds it difficult to have a normal, healthy sex life. The first days of marriage will thus be filled with sorrow rather than happiness" (Niranjana 1973a, 38). Another instance is when she talks about how elders provide the young with unscientific knowledge when a girl has her period saying that, "The crow has touched her. That is why she is sitting far away from the rest of us" (see earlier note 29).

Anupama makes a distinction between religious texts and *dharma shastras* on the one hand and superstitious beliefs on the other. In *Dampatya Deepike,* she draws on texts from earlier times, alongside scientific texts to make her argument. They are seen as embodying knowledge unlike the aunt's advice or the stories and practices around menstruation, which are seen as beliefs that have to be replaced with scientific knowledge. The use of texts from historic times can be interpreted through the statement that a doctor makes in Anupama's *Kempammana Magu*, a book on pregnancy and post-natal practices written in the form of a story and meant for a rural readership. One of the characters in the story who is a social worker in a village and finds it difficult to teach the people says, "Whatever we tell these people, they won't understand. Their hearts are good. But…" The doctor who has just settled down in the village disagrees with her and says, "We have to tell the people in a way they will understand…that's in our hands, isn't it?" (Niranjana 1991, 2). Hence texts from the past are used in as much as they are means of understanding. However, what has to be taught is the language of scientific-development.

The legitimacy given by Anupama to Indian texts from the past as embodying knowledge unlike common beliefs that are seen as superstition seems to mirror a nationalist argument about cultural practices having deviated from ancient Hindu texts that represent our true culture. The division replicates a modernist language rather than questioning it. Thus, I argue the invocation of ancient texts does not disrupt the scientific-developmental narrative but only helps legitimise it.

Susie Tharu seems to make a similar argument while talking about the advice writings of Saroj Pathak. Tharu argues that the form of the advice writings is that of a 'frontal spectacle'. She draws on Prasad who describes "a frontal spectacle [as one] in which the performer is the bearer of the message from the Symbolic which must be transmitted through a direct contractual link" (Tharu 1998a, 220). This is unlike the realist form of the novel where the interpretative authority lies with the reader. Even in the liberal narrative of realism it is not as though the interpretative authority challenges the frame of representation. This is because this authority is vested only with a subject with the privilege of citizenship and who can take the place of the absent narrator and the state. However, the interpretative authority allows for the citizen to occasionally speak as the subject. Hence there is a closer alignment with the developmental-modern language of the state in the case of the advice writings than in the case of fiction (Tharu 1998a, 221).

Thus, the advice writings, on the one hand, complement the fiction writings in that they provide a 'scientific' understanding of the romance, love and conjugality that the novels are concerned with. They are part of the same desire for modernity and articulate the same language of the developmental-modern. Like the fiction, through the language of equality, they question normative invocations of *dharma*. But they are unlike the fiction, which through its form of narrativisation disrupts the state's developmental-modern language. The prose writings do depart from the statist language when, for instance, Anupama introduces the importance of sexuality for

women, separates sex from reproduction and foregrounds how the wife's needs and desires have to be met in order to constitute the ideal couple. However, this departure does not disrupt the state's developmental language. As I suggested in the beginning of the chapter, the particular form of the advice writing where the responsibility of the writer, representing the executive-authority speaking on behalf of the state, is to fashion subjects into citizens, does not allow for ambiguity and fractures in the developmental narrative. Thus the gap between the citizen and the subject that we saw in the novels is absent in the advice writings by women. The advice writings, unlike the novels, do not constitute a Feminine Symbolic. We can read the texts as subverting and questioning the dominant Symbolic but as located within the language of the Symbolic.

I will discuss in the next chapter how conjugality was narrativised by the popular women's novels of the 1970s. How do we understand those narratives in relation to the modernist-statist language? Do they reveal a gap between the citizen and the subject that we found in the mid-century romance novels? Before I address these questions, I would like to briefly discuss in the section below the changing delineation of the question of marriage in women's prose writings with the emergence of the women's movement during the 1970s in the West and in India, which will also provide a vantage point from which to read the 1970s popular novels.

Feminism and the Question of Marriage

Within the dominant feminist vocabulary on marriage, as I discussed in Chapter 1, the question of marriage has usually been raised to point to the patriarchal nature of marriage. From this perspective, the advice writings of women writers I have discussed, including Anupama's before 1975, would be seen as being within a patriarchal frame of marriage, not radically questioning the structure of marriage itself. However, as I have been trying to suggest, it is problematic to locate a politics or notion of women's agency only outside of marriage. What the trajectory of the advice and fiction writings interestingly show is that the year 1975 did not mark a radical rupture in the raising of the women's question. Instead, the women's question has had a longer history with women writers from the 1950s trying to articulate a notion of patriarchy, even if they did not name it as such.

It is around 1975 that a discourse of feminism emerged with the United Nations announcing it as the International Women's Year, and with the beginning of a new phase in the women's movement in India (Niranjana 1990). The year marked a break in many writers, including Anupama, whose writings after 1975 are self-identified as feminist. However, I would like to mention that we see evidence of women identifying themselves as feminists even earlier. In response to the feminist movement in the West, these women were chalking out in the Kannada periodicals of the early 1970s the questions that a proposed 'movement' in India should address

(Kripalani 1971; Niranjana et al. 1972). I would like to briefly address the question of whether the articulation of the question of marriage took a particular turn with the new phase of feminism.

The prose writings of the 1970s narrativised the women's movements, both in the West and in India. Some of the positions in response to the women's movement in the West in the 1970s celebrated our culture arguing that men and women complement each other, unlike in the West where they exist in a hierarchy (Rao, R. 1973; Editorial 1972). What is surprising however is the positive response to the movement. There are articles that argue that we need to address the question of patriarchy in India (Kripalani 1971). This perception is present even in those writings that point to the contradictory images of women in our culture where they are perceived as slaves but also seen as goddesses (Srisa 1972). However, there were questions being raised about whether we need a women's movement in India and if so what its nature should be (Niranjana et al. 1972). If some of the writers argue for the need for a women's movement, others who suggest that patriarchy exists, also suggest that the establishment of the independent nation-state and its programmes redressed the unequal status of women, the only task ahead being to educate Indian women about their rights (Srisa 1972; Niranjana et al. 1972; Rangachar 1972).

One of the significant points of contention of the writers with the feminist movement of the West was the issue of marriage. These writers state the importance

of *preserving* the institution of (monogamous) marriage against the Western feminist discourse where marriage was made the locus and basis of patriarchy and hence something to be done away with (Kripalani 1971; Shakuntala 1972). Some of the writers argue that women here were bearers of tradition, which predominantly governs marriage and conjugal practices, but deny that marriage is oppressive (Murthy 1972; Srisa 1972).[35] However, many writers point to problems that women face in marriage and insist that we need to bring about suitable reforms in the sphere of marriage.

What constitutes the discourse around reform in the periodicals, sometimes articulated and sometimes not, is the criticism of the polygamous practice of Muslims. For instance, there are articles that discuss the problem of *talaq* and polygamy and suggest that we need to bring all marriage laws under a single code (*Prajamata* 1971b; Bharadwaj 1972). What is also discussed around this time is the failure of the Soviet experimentation with non-monogamous family relationships (*Prajamata* 1971b). The anxiety to protect and preserve the institution of marriage was also a reaction to cultural developments in the West—of gay and lesbian marriages and of hippie culture which were seen as representing sexual excesses (Shakuntala 1972; Niranjana 1973a).[36]

[35] There are articles beginning to appear in *Sudha* which countered images of women that either celebrated traditional womanhood or made fun of the 'modern woman' (Kandur 1974).

[36] Anupama takes a moralistic stand in relation to masturbation and same-sex relationships. Though she does not condemn it in the manner of Ma. Na. Murthy, who would perceive it as an 'addiction', she says that people should not indulge in such practices in excess and should abstain from them after marriage (Niranjana 1973a). Even in *Kelu Kishori*, she cautions the youth not to indulge in pre-marital

The change in position in relation to the question of marriage can be located around 1975, with the beginnings of the women's movement in India. If *dharma* was a frame within which *dampatya* could be negotiated before 1975, and through which there was a marking of oneself as different from the West, the later writings, such as Anupama's *Manini* (1986) locate women's subordination centrally around the nodes of *dharma* and marriage. We will see how this is also visible in Anupama's later novels which are discussed in the next chapter.

With the 1980s, there is a consolidation of feminist writing with a new generation of feminists like R. Poornima, K. Vijayashree, Vijayashree Sabarada, B. S. Venkatalakshmi and Hemalatha Mahishi writing in periodicals. There are equally strong responses during that period to these feminist articulations. Apart from satires of feminists and activists in women's organisations as man-haters or home breakers there are many letters from readers who were now extensively commenting on these writers' articles. The responses range from agreeing and upholding feminist positions, such as pointing to marriage and motherhood as oppressive (Readers' Forum 1981)[37] to criticisms about writers misleading the youth or dismissing women who did not fit into the feminist ideal (Rao, V 1985; Rao S. 1985). Both these positions point to a new commonsense being created about feminism, the beginnings of which are articulated in women's writings of the 1970s, such as the novels of Usha

sex and practice moderation unlike in the West where the youth indulge in sexual excesses as a form of rebellion (Niranjana 1973b).

[37] For instance the number of affirmative responses to the question of "Is motherhood a curse?" in *Sudha*'s Ugadi special issue is quite startling (Readers' Forum 1981).

Navarathnaram, Saisuthe and the later novels of Anupama, which I will turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Return to Marriage and Feminist Departures: Splitting of the Romance Narrative in the 1970s

Women writing novels during the 1950s-60s who had acquired a huge readership predominantly in the context of paperback publications and the emergence of new periodicals were followed by other women who started writing in the 1970s and became popular through serialisation in periodicals. Serialisation that had become an established phenomenon by this time was almost solely responsible for the high circulation of the periodicals (Venkatalakshmi 1991, 134-135). These novels, like the earlier novels, created a significant constituency of readers. A group of readers mentioned in an interview that their 'craze for reading' started because of the serials that were published in the periodicals *Sudha* and *Mayura* (Aiyanna et al. 2005).[1]

The 1970s novels fashioned women's subjectivity by positing a notion of the woman's 'self', just as we saw in the mid-century women's novels. Further, if we understand the notions of *dharma* and 'equality', not in terms of the author's *assertion* or *denial* but as an overarching frame within which women's subjectivity was shaped, then there is a continuity from the 1950s-60s to the 1970s women's writings. However, the woman's 'self' in the 1970s romance novels is represented as negotiating the notions of *dharma* and equality differently from

[1] See Appendix 6 for a set of cartoons referring to the popularity of the periodicals and to how women were both producers and consumers of the periodicals.

that of the mid-century women's romances. I study 1970s women's novels in relation to the feminist discourse that was emerging in the early 1970s, as I mentioned in Chapter 4.

I suggest that in the 1970s women's novels we see a splitting of the romance narrative of the 1950s-60s women's novels into two narratives that can be found in two sets of novels. In the first set of novels we see a shift from the narrative of conjugality to that of couple formation. These novels were trying to negotiate women's subjectivity within the frame of *dharma* and 'equality' very differently from the mid-century women's novels. For the purposes of this chapter, I will discuss only two writers: Usha Navaratnaram (hereafter also Usha), whose first novel was written in 1971 (*Hombisilu*) and Saisuthe, whose first novel was written in 1976 (*Minchu*).[2] I choose them not only because they were the most popular among the novelists but also because they adequately exemplify the shift from the conjugality narrative of the second-generation women novelists.[3] Both these writers became prominent largely because of serialisation. The second set of novels continued with the narrativisation of conjugality that the mid-century women's novels inaugurated. These novels claimed a feminist stance and can be represented by the later novels of Anupama and those by H. V. Savithramma.

[2] As with the second-generation women novelists, I use here Usha's first name, as is the practice of calling her. Her husband Navaratnaram was also a writer.
[3] There were other women novelists who were writing popular novels in this period, such as H. G. Radhadevi, Mangala Satyan and K. Saroja Rao. B.S.Venkatalakshmi grades these popular writers into three groups according to the quality of writing. The above group, to which both Usha Navaratnaram and Saisuthe belong, she suggests write on 'banal subjects', with a 'lack of experience' and for sheer 'entertainment' without giving much work for 'thought'. The second group, which is slightly better, includes M. C. Padma, Devaki Murthy, A. P. Malati, and Saroja Narayana Rao. Among the third and the best are writers like Ichanur Jayalakshmi (1991b, 133-137).

Anupama identified herself as a feminist and participated in the activities of women's groups. H. V. Savithramma on the other hand, did not identify herself as a feminist. Though her writings are very powerful in their articulation of patriarchy, when asked whether she drew from her own experiences, she vehemently dismissed the suggestion (Venkatalakshmi 1991c, 165). I will analyse below the different constructions of women's subjectivity and the romance narrative of couple formation in the two sets of novels, which I call 'popular feminist' and 'popular non-feminist' for convenience.

In academic discussions on Kannada literature, the novels by Usha and Saisuthe have been completely ignored by both mainstream and feminist scholars. There has hardly been any attempt to analyse their writings in the recent scholarship on mass media and popular literature, which stops at merely mentioning their names (Narayana 1997c, 273; Venkatalakshmi 1991b, 137). If mainstream critics have ignored these writers from a hegemonic perspective that recognises only certain kinds of literature as 'aesthetic', feminist scholars have been dismissive of their novels for giving more importance to the romance between man and woman, emphasising the woman's physical beauty rather than her intellectual ability, and not questioning the naturalisation of the woman's location in the sphere of the home (Venkatalakshmi 1991b, 134).[4] Even the little attention paid to writers like Triveni and Anupama by feminist critics have not been given to these writers. More generally, among studies on popular culture, there have been attempts to review popular women's fiction within the ambit of

[4] See above note 1 for Venkatalakshmi's comments on writers like Usha and Saisuthe.

cultural studies. These attempts largely focus on the question of the patriarchal construction of gender roles and locate possibilities of women's resistance, either in the narrative or in the act of reading by women (Radway 1984; Modleski 1982). Moving away from both these modes of analysis, I investigate the popular non-feminist novels in order to understand how women's subjectivity was being fashioned in their texts in relationship to the language of equality and of *dharma*. How does this compare with the shaping of women's subjectivity by the second-generation women novelists? I analyse whether and how the question of conjugality, that was central to the mid-century women's novels, figures in the popular non-feminist women's novels.

The novels of Usha and Saisuthe are like the conventional romance narrative where a significant part of the narrative is devoted to raising the problem of marriage, delineating the 'romance' and resolving the problem through marriage or what in narrative terms is called couple formation. Unlike in the mid-century romances and the popular feminist novels of the 1970s, where couple formation is narratively constructed in the beginning or middle of the novel and the rest of the novel is devoted to the narrativisation of the conjugal relationship, in the popular non-feminist romances there is a lack of emphasis on conjugality. The latter represent women's subjectivity not within the conjugal space but in a context of a romance that progresses towards marriage. In cases where marriage occurs in the beginning or middle of the novel and there is a dramatisation of conflict within the conjugal relationship, the resolution to the conflict brought about through love, companionship and understanding is complete. That is, these

romances have closed endings unlike the earlier romances and the popular feminist novels, which have open or tragic endings, and where the problem of conjugality is not completely resolved.

Usha Navaratnaram's novels revolve around a woman protagonist who is usually poor. She is either orphaned, or if she has parents has to support herself and her family because of a sick father. Her main attribute and asset is her beauty. The hero is represented as kind, understanding, usually well-to-do, either having inherited wealth or becoming wealthy because of his profession as a doctor or industrialist. The two fall in love but do not reveal it to each other till the end of the novel. The woman does not reveal her love because of her pride. The man does not explicitly talk of his love because of the woman's 'stubbornness' but his passionate love is revealed during a crisis towards the end of the novel. There are other kinds of novels that are not romance novels. For example, *Makkaliralavva Manethumba* (Let the House be Full of Children) deals with the 'social problem' of over-population and sex-trafficking through narrating the travails of a poor rural family with many daughters. However, the romance novel is the most common and what the readers identify as a typical Usha Navaratnaram story. Some readers, comparing her novels to the Mills and Boon romances, mention that they are apt for light and enjoyable reading (Swarnagowri 2005).[5] However, unlike the Mills and Boon romances, Usha's novels are seen as not 'vulgar' and as giving more importance to love (Rao, M. 2005).

[5] Her readers, even those who mention that her novels, unlike those of Triveni, lack substance vouch for her style of dialogue and narration that make reading easy and pleasurable (Swarnagowri 2005; Rao, M. 2005).

The narrative of Usha's novels follows the convention of the romance novel in moving towards couple formation. Sometimes couple formation occurs in the early half of the novel and there is a depiction of fractures in the conjugal relationship. In both cases, the obstacle is posed as the woman's ego, pride or stubbornness. Though this sense of ego or pride may be perceived as stubbornness (*monduthana*, *hata*), usually stated at the end of the novel where the woman 'realises her foolhardiness, admits her love and is accepted by the man', there is in the narrative a more ambiguous sense of this ego or pride as 'selfhood'. This notion of self is articulated within a liberal language of equality and rights that is manifest in the language of the state but is invoked in a fuzzy sense. The fuzziness is because the invocation of the notion of equality is neither within any clear framework nor uniformly present through the novel.

The notion of the woman's 'self' implicitly confronts a tradition that asks her to be submissive or non-confrontationist. However, the confrontation is not foregrounded in the novel. The 'self' is invoked to suggest that the woman is no less than a man in accomplishing a job or in the woman asserting herself because she feels cheated by a man but never to articulate a notion of patriarchy. In Usha's novels, the language of selfhood is shown as arising from a personal experience of injustice or victimisation as a woman. In *Happy Birthday* (1973) it is because the woman was cheated into marrying a man who already had a wife and three children. This unjust experience transforms Uma, the woman protagonist. In conversation with the male protagonist when he has dropped her off at her place, she says:

"…When I think of men, I feel something... It is hatred at times…

Sudhakar felt as though a thunderbolt had struck him. Immediately switching off the lights inside his car, he said,

"I wish you would change your attitude; because of one man's meanness, it is wrong to hate all men!"

"If you had experienced what I did, you would know!" Uma said, a little harshly.

"I am sorry…I do understand" Sudhakar sighed and started his car and left before she could give an answer.

Suma [his niece], who was quiet till then put her hand over his and asked:

"Why Sudhi, are you angry with my teacher?"

Giving a dry smile Sudhakar said, "No, Sumi, I like your teacher very much. She is a fool, a sentimental fool!" (Navaratnaram 1985, 49)

This moment when the woman speaks of her experience of injustice is an important moment in the novel when a sense of the woman's 'self' is articulated. It shocks Sudhakar, who immediately switches off the lights in the car in his inability to face her. He cannot bear to see the intensity of her hatred, even though he later dismisses the whole thing by saying that she is a 'sentimental fool'. There are a series of such moments in the novel when the woman asserts her 'self', giving another dimension to her portrayal as a wronged figure. The second moment that we see Uma asserting herself is when she hears from Ratna, her

husband's first wife that she is actually the second wife. Recollecting that day, the narrator wonders:

> Even though she was saying all this, didn't my Rangaraja sit like a stone without any reaction! He probably did not have anything to say! Only when [Uma] ran to her room and banged her door shut did he start banging on the door… Neither did she open her door. Nor did she do what he wanted her to do. (Navaratnaram 1985, 56-57)

This is followed by another act of assertion where the woman protagonist throws away her *thali*[6] and returns to her parental home. Interestingly, Uma's feeling of injustice is shown as felt not only in relation to herself but also in relation to Ratna. Her husband not only treats Ratna like a servant but also lies to Uma that she is a distant relative, thus deeply hurting the first wife (Navaratnaram 1985, 55-56). Uma deals with the injustice differently from the way Ratna does. While Ratna merely suffers the injustice, Uma is shown as questioning it.

This notion of self can also be seen in a more recent novel *Uyilu* (2000) where the woman protagonist Lahari is an orphan who is single and struggling to make ends meet. Her life takes a different turn when she finds out that she has inherited property and wealth from her long lost grandfather who had cut off

[6] "One day without telling anyone I came back. I threw away the *thali* which was tied around my neck" (Navaratnaram 1973, 47). The *thali* is a thread tied by the husband around the wife's neck; an important and sacred sign of marriage.

financial support to her parents because they had married against his wishes. She decides to go to her grandfather's estate and set up along with her home, other kinds of services for women and children, such as a school and hospital. Her cousin, Naveen, feels that because of legal issues regarding the property, Lahari should postpone her plans. Lahari is however skeptical about Naveen's suggestion because she feels he is furthering his own interest. She also does not want to be seen as helpless because she is a woman, "No *shastri*, these men are like that. They can't tolerate women going ahead of them.[7] I have determined to do some good work. No one can stop me from doing it" (Navaratnaram 2000, 133). When her friend says, "Just because Naveen has done this and that, can you do it too? He is after all a man!", Lahari's response is: "I don't want your theory. If he is a man I am a woman. I can do better than him." (ibid., 125).

In the end Naveen is shown to be a man with good intentions and one who loves Lahari but through the novel, we the readers, as much as Lahari herself, are kept in the dark about his true character. Towards the end of the novel, Lahari is shown to be stubborn, a quality which almost leads her to her death. However, her skepticism through the novel, arising from her experience of living single and in poverty when no one would come forward to marry her but were now waiting in a queue to do so, is not shown to be completely invalid: "Now that I have money, everyone will readily come. But no one will come for 'me'" (Navaratnaram 2000, 96).

[7] A *shastri* is a priest by profession, who is also referred to by the title.

Most of Usha's novels take a similar path where the first half of the novel tries to establish the readers' sympathy for the woman protagonist, providing a context for fashioning her notion of 'self'. Towards the end of the novel however, the woman is shown to be excessively or unnecessarily stubborn. The denouement is brought about with the act of 'foolhardiness' on the woman's part that leads her to a near-death experience, during which time the man expresses his love for the woman and vice versa.

In all the novels, as is shown in the above instance, though the obstacle to couple formation is shown as stubbornness (*monduthana*, *hata*), that quality is also shown as an assertion of self or independence that arises from a personal experience of victimisation or insecurity that makes the woman sensitive and unable to express her anger and dissatisfaction except in this manner.

Another novel where the woman's assertion of self is portrayed is *Hombisilu* (1971). Rupa, the woman protagonist, who is a doctor, is an orphan who is looked after by her uncle, aunt and grandfather. Though the men treat her with love, her aunt's comments and attitude make her feel that she is a burden to the family. This is compounded by her apprehension that the man she is asked to marry only wants a lady assistant doctor and not a wife.[8] This feeling of being 'unwanted' recurs through different episodes in the novel. After the wedding, there is discord between the two because of the presence of another woman,

[8] "Knotting his eyebrows he said, 'I don't want a woman; I want an assistant lady doctor that's all…'" (1985, 10).

Vasanthi, who Nataraj appoints as Rupa's assistant without letting her know, and who flirts with him. Rupa decides then that she will only remain his assistant and never his wife: "What a thing has happened! How to break free from this net I am caught in. The mind was numb! True. I should remain Dr. Nataraj's assistant! Never his wife" (Navaratnaram 1985, 96). Like Uma's act of shutting the door and throwing away her *thali* in *Happy Birthday*, the above utterance by the protagonist forms the crux of the novel where she asserts her self.

If Rupa's perception of the relationship between Vasanthi and Nataraj is shown as mistaken, her sense of being 'unwanted' is placed far more ambiguously, when it is felt in response to Nataraj's indifferent and 'rugged' behaviour, suggesting a legitimacy to her feelings. Whether the indifference and ruggedness suggests 'masculinity' or 'insensitivity' is left uncertain, as we can see in a couple of instances that I cite below.

On the day of marriage Rupa feels she is only a toy (*kaigombe*) caught amidst everyone else's desires. She thinks: "What kind of marriage is this! That day she had seen Nataraj, till the day of marriage she had not seen him. Not a word of love, not an experience that was memorable? Nothing. He wanted an assistant. Her family wanted her to get married. What was her part in this? A toy in their hands!" (ibid., 36).

Further, on the first night, when Nataraj tries to pull her towards him, Rupa struggles to push him away and threatens to scream. The narrator states how

Nataraj did not give up: "On her mouth that was opened to scream he placed his mouth to shut her up. In his powerful arms she felt like she was melting. She felt she was choking for breath. When his arms loosened she used all her strength to push him away. 'I hate you', she said and wiped her mouth" (Navaratnaram 1985, 40-41).

The lack of words of love and affection from Nataraj after the wedding, even when she has gone to her parental family's home for her grandfather's funeral, reinforce the image of her being 'unwanted': "Not a letter for her. No news that he was coming to town. If he comes all of a sudden like this! One week after marriage if he felt bored to write even a letter what will be my state in the future? To whom can I talk about my loss? Was there anyone who was close to her or liked her?" (ibid., 76).

How do we compare the representation of internal conflict of the woman protagonist to the depiction of mental conflict in the novels of Triveni and her generation? As I mentioned before, these novels have closed narratives where the resolution to the problem of couple formation is complete. Further, the form of the narrative does not reveal the undoing of the narrative of couple formation. The conflict experienced by the woman is located within an aspiration to find a closure to couple formation rather than in the context of the woman caught between following her *dharma* and asserting her 'self', which was the case in the mid-century women's novels. Unlike the latter, the conflict is in the nature of conscious reflection rather than in the psychotic excess of the mid-century

women's novels. Thus, the conflict does not constitute a 'hysterical excess' outside of the developmental-modern language of the state. The form merely reiterates the statist language that is found in the thematic delineation of the notion of the woman's self within a frame of equality. This notion of self, for instance, can be seen in Rupa not wanting to be a 'toy' in everyone's hands. Also, as I suggested before, the notion is invoked in a fuzzily liberal framework and not in order to raise the question of patriarchy.

Interestingly, the notion of self that is located within equality does not necessarily question *dharma*, unlike the mid-century romance novels where equality was centrally posed in conflict with *dharma* with different resolutions. Sometimes we see a positing of a notion of *stridharma* as an ideal. Here, the notion of *dharma* figures in the conduct of and the qualities embodied by the woman. Instances are where the hardworking and composed nature of Rupa (Navaratnaram 1985) and Manjula (Navaratnaram 2000) are posed against the wanton, unrestrained (*svechche*) behaviour of Vasanthi (Navaratnaram 1985) and Jamuna (Navaratnaram 2000). However, this conflict is not primary to the novels and is muted. This is somewhat like the social novels that did not portray the conflict between *dharma* and modernity. Only unlike the woman protagonist of the social novels being located within *dharma*, here she is located within modernity.

If Usha Navarathnaram's novels produce a particular notion of women's subjectivity, another construction of women's subjectivity can be seen in the

novels of Saisuthe that depict the struggles of a poor brahmin family living in a town or city. As in Usha Navarathnaram's novels, the woman protagonist is the sole bread-winner of the family because her father is either ill or disabled (Saisuthe 1983; 1985; 2000; 2004a). However, unlike the former, the fact of the woman having to work outside is seen as an obstacle to her marriage, marriage being the primary objective towards which the narrative moves. Placed in contrast to the central woman character is another woman who the male protagonist is supposed to marry and whose family the woman protagonist is indebted or related to (Saisuthe 1983; 1985; 2000; 2004b). The narrative moves forward through the delineation of a 'good' femininity represented by the central woman character and a 'bad' femininity represented by the 'other woman' and ends in the former triumphing over the latter to form the couple with the central male character.

The male protagonist is shown to be an essentially good man. He possesses the values of tradition and modernity in the right proportion, as in the case of Ramesh and Madhu in *Minchu* and Rahul in *Chirabandhavya* (Saisuthe 1983; 2004b). Otherwise, he temporarily goes astray in the absence of parental guidance. For instance, Prasad in *Badada Hu* (A Flower that Never Wilts) learns bad habits that are seen as westernised: he smokes, drinks and is sexually promiscuous. However, through the experience of true love, he is shown to be transformed into a good person (Saisuthe 1985; 2004a).

The relationship between the male and female protagonists is sometimes one of conflict (Saisuthe 1985) and sometimes not (Saisuthe 1983; 2004b). Where there is conflict it is because of class difference that makes the woman feel inferior but also indicates different values of life she is not comfortable with. Where there is no conflict, the obstacle to couple formation is the 'other woman'.

Saisuthe uses dominant notions of femininity and tradition that prevail in the Indian context. The woman is presented as the embodiment and bearer of tradition and family values, questioning Westernised notions of liberation. The emphasis is on fashioning a self in relation to certain cultural values of humility and submission. The woman who is upheld as virtuous is beautiful, wears saris, is respectful of elders, and believes in God and in family values. Hema in *Badada Hu* has a God-given *drishti* mole to ward off the evil eye. In *Minchu* Prasad says of his sister, Gita, "For a girl shyness is the only ornament. And our Gita wears that very well" (Saisuthe 1983, 179). In contrast the 'other woman' wears pants, is dismissive of tradition and rituals, does not help with housework, speaks to elders without respect, and behaves in a way seen as inappropriate for a woman. For instance, Mala's behaviour in *Minchu* is seen as unseemly by her brother-in-law:

> Mala was speaking and laughing every moment and trying very hard to attract Prasad. Brought up by traditional parents, Raghavendra felt that Mala's behaviour was vulgar. "I shouldn't have brought her here at all." When he, as a man, was sitting in a

respectable manner, her behaviour, being a woman, was excessive (*athi*) (Saisuthe 1983, 141).

The 'good' woman is represented as located within tradition, without experiencing conflict with it. Certain 'modern' notions such as love-marriage or falling in love do not figure as an aberration within the narrative. It is performed not through conflict with parents but with their consent, often through their initiation. However, there is a questioning of a rigid dogmatic following of ritualistic practices and certain forms of women's discrimination. This 'narrow mindedness' is usually embodied in one of the older women in the novel. In *Kalyanamastu*, for instance, the mother sees the son as the 'light of the family' (*kutumbakke deepa*) (Saisuthe 2000, 10) and keeps insisting that the daughter get married (ibid, 28). So too in *Badada Hu* the mother wants her daughter to get married, fears sending her daughter outside to work and is very orthodox (*madi*). This critique of tradition articulates nationalist notions of 'good tradition' and 'bad tradition', where the former is located in an idea of the essence of Hindu culture and the latter in ritualistic practices that are seen as meaningless.[9] Also, Saisuthe's novels articulate a modern notion of 'self', in the woman protagonist being educated, though claiming to be located within tradition. Thus, though the narrative does not articulate the language of equality, it does speak the modernist language of the state. Perhaps it is most in alignment with it in the invocation of

[9] The need to reform Hindu culture through retaining its essence while discarding its ritualistic aspect, for instance, was propounded by Dayananda Saraswati who set up the Arya Samaj (See Chakravarti 1989).

tradition as we saw above and further, as we will see below in the positing of an opposition between Indian and Western culture.

The assertion of the woman's self within tradition is set up against Western notions of agency. Thus the primary conflict between *dharma* and 'self' that is delineated in the mid-century women's novels is replaced by the conflict between Indian tradition and Western culture. The central woman character is shown to be an upholder of Indian values whereas the other woman is represented as one who is westernised and makes fun of Indian culture and values. In *Badada Hu*, there is a conversation between the two, at the conclusion of which the woman protagonist is represented as embodying the feminine ideal:

> "Our girl has a strong national pride; more than foreign art and literature, she is proud of Indian art, drama and literature," Raghavendra said looking towards Hema in appreciation.
>
> "Hema, it looks like you are very orthodox. We are not as civilised as they are. Here, everything has to be masked with custom and rules. Unlike them, our poets and dramatists don't portray the real thing," Mala said with disinterest.
>
> Hema got very upset. Even if [Mala] spoke ill about her it was all right, how could she speak so dismissively about a culture, about poets who had set an example to the rest of the world, she thought. "Mala, you are mistaken. Our country's literature and art are exemplary, and will always remain so. When our litterateurs

> depict something they give importance to values," she said with passion.
>
> "What we want is entertainment. What will we do with their values?"
>
> Hema felt like laughing at her words.
>
> "When you say entertainment I don't know what you mean. When you eat you don't only think of taste. We should ask whether it has the essence/ substance (*satva*) to protect our health. Forgetting that if we only think of taste and eat food that has a lot of oil and fat, we will fall sick; likewise if we only give attention to entertainment, we have to drift aimlessly in a sea of chaos."
>
> Prasad was dumbstruck by Hema's eloquence. He had only seen beauty, good character and education in Hema; but today she was the woman who stood on the pinnacle of idealism. (Saisuthe 1985, 143-144)

Whether the contrast represented in the two characters, Hema and Mala, is a critique of Western notions of liberation, development, civilisation and progress which claim a universality or whether it is an uncritical celebration of Indian tradition accompanied by an equally unqualified criticism of Western culture is a question we need to answer.

Let us take another instance of the defence of Indian tradition. When Nirmala in *Minchu* says that she will eat after the husband and that if a woman

serves with her left hand the food will not fill the man's stomach, her husband Ramesh subtly mocks such notions of equality, "This is the International Women's Year. Actually you should eat first" (Saisuthe 1983, 14). In the same novel there is a criticism of a *mahila samaja* (women's association)[10], which announces its objectives as helping women get divorced and allowing them to have as many husbands as they want. Even this can be read in two ways. It can be read as either satirising women's associations or criticising women's organisations that function in a manner that caricature the meaning of women's agency. Along with certain modes of representative politics mentioned above, Saisuthe also criticises forms such as street protests (Saisuthe 1983). In contrast to this, she poses a political ideal of a single woman who leads a simple, Gandhian life and runs a destitute home for women (Saisuthe 2004b).

Let us look at another instance of the criticism of *mahila samaja* activities seen in Anupama's *Muktichitra*, where the critique is made from a very different perspective. Anupama's representation of a political ideal is that of a feminist group that intervenes in matters of domestic violence and dowry death in contrast to which she shows the *mahila samaja* (women's association) as merely a group of rich, middle class women coming together to discuss and exchange recipes, fashion and gossip. If we suppose that Anupama's and Saisuthe's positions represent two different ways of addressing the women's question and that Saisuthe's position can still be considered a 'political' critique, we can get a better picture of Saisuthe's understanding of tradition and the relation of the woman to it

[10] The *mahila samaja* is a distinct kind of women's association that emerged in early twentieth century India, that functioned largely within the 'social reform' frame.

in a scene in *Badada Hu* where Mala and Hema debate over what constitutes ideal femininity:

> "It is a shame to womankind that we find people like you in such global times. In our country, even today they are pushing women to the kitchen, putting her in chains and destroying her," Mala said.
>
> Though [Hema] had wanted to end this conversation as soon as possible, Mala's harsh words provoked her to speak:
>
> "Indian women are not in chains. Our Vedas and elders have honoured her by saying '*matrudevobhava*' (mother is god) and putting her first. Auspicious occasions like sacrifices (*yagna*, *yagadi*), marriages have been prohibited to take place in her absence. The respect of the whole household is centred around the woman. God himself has given her an elevated status. A girl who bears responsibility of the household is the *grihalakshmi* (goddess of the house) of that house. Is there a higher status than that? (Saisuthe 1985, 144-145)

'Tradition' in Saisuthe's novels not only provides the woman with the language of resistance but also becomes instrumental in empowering women. Further, this celebration of Indian tradition is accompanied by the criticism of Western culture. Unlike in the second-generation women novelists, in Saisuthe the binary between Indian tradition and Western culture becomes central to the

narrative. If we examine Usha Navaratnaram's novels, there is a critique of the westernised woman, which is represented in a woman who smokes, drinks and has affairs. However, there is also an implicit criticism of a tradition that perceives domestic work as the sole responsibility of the woman (Navaratnaram 2000) or suggests that the woman should prioritise her marriage and the household over her job or career (Navaratnaram 1985; 1998; 2000). Most of the women protagonists, unlike Saisuthe's protagonists, are women who want to work and who strongly articulate the need for 'equality', as I mentioned earlier.

The subjectivity of the woman in Saisuthe's novels is located within *dharma*. However, it is a normative *dharma*, any questioning of which is seen as *adharma*. The notions of *dharma* and *adharma* parallel the notions of Indian tradition and Western culture, where the former represents the ideal. In this sense, Saisuthe's novels move away from the secular-scientific narratives of the 1950s-60s novels. However, her assertion of tradition is not done in such a manner that destabilises the modernist-statist logic. As I have suggested before, the mere invocation of *dharma* or tradition is not a questioning of the modern language of the state given its post-colonial trajectory. We need to understand this in two ways. One, as I have pointed out in Chapter 1, the contradictory nature of the Indian state manifests itself in cultural texts as the conflict between tradition and modern. Tradition underwrites the logic of modernity and the state rather than destabilising it. Two, scholars have shown that Indian nationalist discourse set up tradition as the domain in which India was superior to the West, the latter being seen as having an upper hand in the realm of science and technology (See

Chatterjee 1989). The celebration of Indian tradition continues with independence, further in the new nation-state's attempt to create a national tradition. Saisuthe's celebration of Indian tradition is similar to the nationalist upholding of an Indian tradition that is located in an ancient Hindu culture. Thus, the posing of Indian tradition versus Western culture mimics the modernist language of the state.

Unlike the novels of Usha Navaratnaram and Saisuthe another kind of women's writing was emerging in the late 1960s-early 1970s. These writings articulated a feminist perspective and can be exemplified in the later writings of Anupama, beginning with *Akashagange* (1969) and that of H. V. Savithramma, beginning with *Seethe, Rama, Ravana* (1980). If we read the popular feminist writings in conjunction with Veena Shanteshwar's 'literary' feminist writings, beginning to be published in 1969 and which I will briefly discuss later, it seems as though feminist articulations in Karnataka precede the beginnings of feminism in India, which is marked as the late 1970s (Kumar 1998, Gandhi and Shah 1993).

In the writings of Anupama and Savithramma, we see a vocabulary of patriarchy, oppression and resistance that is now identifiable as characteristically feminist. Anupama's *Madhavi*, which is based on the mythological character of the same name, is among the first popular novels that proclaims a feminist agenda for women's writing by making Madhavi's oppression and her rebellion the object of the novel, "Having developed a strong disgust about life, about human oppression, she goes far away from it. This is Madhavi's rebellion…" (Niranjana 1976, 10). The novel universalised the experience of oppression of the woman

character as that of all women. In the foreword to the novel, Anupama says, "Whichever caste a woman may belong to, her status in society is that of a *shudra*… [Madhavi] became the central character of my novel not merely as a person who desires freedom or as a woman of all time; Madhavi represents the oppressed woman of all time" (ibid., 8-10).

H. V. Savithramma's *Seethe, Rama, Ravana*, which is a re-writing of the story of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, from the perspective of the women characters in the epic, begins with Kausalya, the queen of Ayodhya, and her servant bonding over their common plight because their husbands were planning to marry other women. Kausalya says, "What is the use of riches if you don't have the love of your husband. You can share everything else but cannot share your husband" (Savithramma 1980, 1-2). Later she adds, "Gowri, you too are a woman. I too am a woman. What if it is a palace, what if it is a hut? Where the woman is cheated of her husband's love, that house itself becomes hell" (ibid., 5). The plight of the two women become instances of the plight of all women, "Another marriage for the king… men's mindset is like that. It is rare that they find love in only one woman" (ibid., 3).

Women's subjectivity in the popular feminist novels was represented through the confrontation of her 'self' with *dharma*, using the language of equality, as we saw in the mid-century women's novels. The representation of conjugality in this narrative gestured towards the patriarchal structuring of that space. However, what might mark a shift from the 1950s-60s novels is not merely

a sharper critique of *dharma* but often the rejection of *dharma*, posing it as incompatible with the woman's self. It becomes a constraint to the woman's self in the popular feminist novels.

Let us take the instances of Anupama's *Madhavi* and H. V. Savithramma's *Seethe, Rama, Ravana* to analyse the narrativisation of conjugality. The disjuncture between the idea of marriage and what it actually is becomes a preoccupation in these novels. In *Madhavi*, the woman protagonist Madhavi wants to marry a prince who is young, handsome, strong, generous, follows *dharma* and, most importantly, is monogamous. When Charunetra, her companion (*sakhi*) says, "A king will have many wives," Madhavi says, "No, my prince is not like that…." (Niranjana 1976, 18). But instead of this dream coming true, she is 'gifted' away to Galava by her father, king Yayati, since he is unable to grant Galava the eight hundred white horses with a single black ear that the latter asks of him. In the story, Galava needs the horses in order to present them to his teacher, the sage Vishwamitra as his fees (*guru dakshina*). Galava, in turn, 'gifts' Madhavi to several kings for a year's tenure each in exchange for the horses that they can offer him. During this time Madhavi is asked to produce a son for each king. Madhavi feels as though she is an 'object' sent from one person to another. Expressing her anger, she says: "Yes, my father has performed sacrifices. I have not. But all I know is that I have been a sacrificial animal" (ibid., 49).

The notion of not being treated like a 'human being' is emphasised elsewhere: "Madhavi, who was standing on the other side of [Galava] sighed,

‘They are trading me like a horse or a cow. Don’t they think I too am a person? It would have been nice if I hadn’t been born at all. No woman should go through this in her life’” (ibid., 96). Similarly, in Anupama’s *Muktichitra*, one of the main characters and the patriarch in the novel, Chidanand, is shown to treat his wife, Janaki, like a toy (*kaigombe*) (Niranjana 1988, 20). In *Seethe, Rama, Ravana*, Kausalya is concerned whether Sita will be treated properly in the Ayodhya household, “How will a girl brought up with respect and with the freedom of a bird survive in this whirlpool of men’s egotism?” (Savithramma 1980, 54-55).

Sexual brutality and rape within marriage becomes a focus in the feminist novels. The descriptions in *Madhavi*, where despite her protests and cries of pain, Devodasa forcibly has sex with Madhavi, are characteristically feminist: “…he pushes her onto the bed and breaks her body to pieces” (Niranjana 1976, 109-110). In *Muktichitra* the wife’s rape on her first night is practically named as such: “The shiver in her legs seemed to spread through her body. He came close. He held her tight and kissed her. He bit her lips. No words of love? No acts of affection? Nothing but sheer attack” (Niranjana 1988, 22).

One of the central concerns of these novels was to question notions of *dharma* (ethics) and *kartavya* (duty). Madhavi raises this question in relation to various characters in the novel, including the sage and the king. Reflecting on the king’s behaviour, she thinks, “He cannot stay with one girl. Is his *dharma* to go to a new flower every moment! She felt disgusted with this kind of dishonest life” (Niranjana 1976, 164). Later when she meets Vishwamitra and asks him why she

was made to go through the ordeal of being 'gifted' from one king to another, Vishwamitra asks her not to think of it as an ordeal but as a virtue, since she has borne four great, enlightened sons. Then she angrily exclaims, "If I had desired these relationships myself, it would have been a different matter. This is a forced ritual (*magha*) bath.[11] You and Galava have together made my life a mess" (ibid., 193-194).

The novels question the different values of *dharma* for people of different status and critique a normative notion of *dharma* that is fixed and unchanging. When the sage Vatavruksha is teaching his disciples that the *dharma* to be followed by a person differs according to whether he is a king, subject or sage, a disciple pointedly asks him, "Why should there be a distinction between a king and his subject? Also, shouldn't *dharma* change with time?" (Niranjana 1976, 136).

Like in the mid-century women's novels, in the popular feminist novels too the confrontation between the self of the woman and *dharma* is played out. (This is the case with the prose writings too, as can be seen in Anupama's *Manini*.) In *Madhavi*, the protagonist questions, "In all this no one asked me about my likes and dislikes. Having become a victim to duty I am merely surviving" (ibid., 109). Later she asks:

[11] *Magha* is the eleventh month in the Hindu lunar calender.

What is a woman's *dharma*? Is it only to remain quiet and not utter a word? Is her *dharma* only to beget and bring up children? Is it to refrain from protesting against whatever injustice is committed?

There were no answers to these questions.

She thought, whatever injustice is done to her neither the sages nor their wives, nor anyone else will speak in her favour; it seems like not to speak is *dharma* (ibid., 136).

In *Seethe, Rama, Ravana*, Kausalya comments on the 'men' of Ayodhya who are acclaimed for their sense of duty: "Caught and struggling underneath the wheels of that duty-mindedness are only the women of this palace" (1980, 77). Later when she wants to go to the forest with Rama on his fourteen-year exile, he says:

"Mother…a woman's place is with her husband…Isn't that right?" Then Kausalya retorts back, "Rama, have you too begun telling me Sri Ranga's ethics (*niti*)? How does it matter that you are a son born in my womb? You are after all a man. You will not be able to understand the sadness and the insult I have experienced. You are teaching me bookish lessons on love and *pativratya*. You cannot buy love or *pativratya* from a shop or pluck it from a tree; you have to cultivate it. All those delicate feelings have disappeared in me. If your father comes to me, now that he is in

> trouble, I have nothing to give in response: love, trust, nothing at all. I am standing with empty hands. Everyone has to experience their misery by themselves; let them" (ibid, 93).

The novels delineate the process of 'growth' of the woman protagonists from being victims to becoming women who assert their 'selves'. During Madhavi's journey through many kingdoms, she encounters other women and learns of their oppression and their modes of negotiating and resisting it. Her servant Mekhala says that when the king's men forced her brother, who wanted to do business, to join the army, he ran away. The soldiers beat her mother for not telling them where he went. When Madhavi asks,

> "Why can't someone do the job they like?" Mekhala says, "Likes and desires are only for the king. His subjects do not have that right." Madhavi got up and impatiently moved from one side to another. She had thought she was the only one who was suffering. When she realised that there were people who were suffering a hundred times more than she, she felt less alone. "You speak so much, Mekhala. Why did you come here? You could have stayed with your mother?" she asks. "I could have. But the king bought me, merely for a hundred gold coins!" says Mekhala. (If I was donated, Mekhala was sold. Mekhala's rate was a hundred gold coins. Mine is two hundred horses for each king). (Niranjana 1976, 112-113)

Madhavi's oppression is portrayed as embodying the subjugation of women across classes. However, there is also a recognition of the specificity in the nature of oppression that the servant experiences. In an interesting meeting with Mandaramale, a devadasi, the latter tells Madhavi:

> I am a devadasi. I am not supposed to marry. When the king desires I come to the palace and go. The king has asked me many times to stay here itself. I don't like to stay like a caged bird. The outside is better. I sleep with whomever I like. The princess shouldn't mistake me for saying this but I have some freedom (Niranjana 1976, 117).

The novel represents a devadasi, who is the 'other' of the *grihini* and who would be seen as 'disreputable' as more agential than a woman within a conjugal relationship. However, the agential nature of Madhavi is also implicated in an emerging feminist discourse in the 1970s where patriarchy would be located in marriage and conjugality.

The encounters with different women become the rites of passage for Madhavi to stand in rebellion at the end of the novel. She says to Galava, "Why did you make a woman go through such torture? No woman in this world will ever forgive you for having hurt me!" Madhavi said passionately (ibid., 200).

After her return to her father's kingdom, a *svayamvara* is arranged for her marriage.[12] During the occasion, Madhavi thinks:

> Yuk, the *jati* of men…. They keep no count of their sins. They would have already prepared the appropriate penitence for the sins they will commit. There is no freedom unless I go far away from them…. Rejecting the world, she quickly rushes towards the forest. No one felt they could stop Madhavi. The people in the *swayamvara* were sitting like statues in stunned silence. (Niranjana 1976, 212)

How do we understand this locating of the 'self? It is perhaps the inability of the woman to find her sense of 'self' within a world governed by *dharma*. The 'self' has to be sought in another world, governed by modern values. How do we read these narratives in relation to the notion of *dharma* and the modernist-statist language? The novels through a re-staging of myths question normative notions of *stridharma* and the difference in standards of *dharma* for the woman and the man. Unlike the popular non-feminist novels, the woman's experience of victimisation is not seen as an individual problem but located within patriarchy. Unlike Saisuthe's novels, there is centrally a criticism of a tradition that is located in a Vedic Hindu culture.

[12] An event where princes from different kingdoms are invited to win the princess's hand in marriage.

However, there is an inadequate critique of modernist notions of equality and conjugality in the 'popular feminist' novels. The narrator projects modern notions of conjugality, represented by love and companionship as superior to a traditional practice such as an arranged marriage, that is seen as a relationship of inequality. For instance, in *Madhavi*, the protagonist raises the question, "What is the meaning of love? Mutual love and respect, similar goals" (ibid., 148). In *Muktichitra* the love-marriage between two like-minded people—Alka and Jayapal—is projected as better than an arranged marriage between strangers. The third person omniscient narrator speaks without ambiguity. Nor is the woman protagonist shown as experiencing mental conflict. What is foregrounded is the woman protagonist's questioning of *dharma* in a clear, argumentative and rational manner. Thus, the critique of the modernist-statist language that we found in the 1950s-60s novels is absent here. The critique is subversive but within the realm of the Symbolic.

Departing from the popular romance, both in terms of the ideals of love and compatibility between the couple and in terms of the form, where there is a story with a beginning, middle and end, and a linear 'growth' of characters and plot through the narrative, another kind of writing was emerging in the late 1960s-early 1970s. This can be seen in the writings of Veena Shanteshwar (beginning with *Mullugalu* 1968) that put forward a feminist perspective in the form of a series of episodes, capsules or frames. Veena was among the first of the women writers to be accepted by both mainstream literary critics and feminist critics. Though her writings have conventionally been compared to the Navya mode of

writing, other than similarities in the use of techniques such as stream-of-consciousness, her writing is quite different, especially in its portrayal of women characters. Among her writings, all of which revolve around man-woman relationships, her novel *Gandasaru* (1978) is a depiction of a series of encounters with men of the woman protagonist Shanti who is in search of 'true love'. Like Veena's other women protagonists, Shanti too is disappointed in conventional relationships with men. Moving away from such relationships she explores and experiments with different forms of heterosexual relationships but fails to find fulfillment even in those. To the question of "what is love?" that is raised through the novel, the answer is only a cynical, "I don't know what that means," that the woman protagonist proclaims at the end of the novel, even as she clasps hands with a foreigner whom she meets on the plane.

Veena tries to point to the difficulties a woman faces in dealing with men of different ideological backgrounds where attributes such as 'conservative' and 'progressive' do not necessarily coincide with the notions of 'tradition' and 'modern' respectively. We see in her novels how, both within conventional marriage and experimental forms of living together, the woman's 'self' is incompletely contained within couple formation, often spilling outside of it. Thus, there is a critique of both what is conventionally represented as tradition and modernity. Veena questions normative notions of *stridharma*, in relation to a woman's behaviour, especially sexual conduct. However, the questioning of *dharma* does not necessarily lead to the woman finding her sense of 'self'. The novels are like the 1950s-60s women's novels in their inability to find a closure.

This absence of closure is different from the absence found in the popular feminist novels. The stream-of-consciousness technique that moves away from the linear and rational mode is akin to the portrayal of mental conflict in the women's romance novels of the 1950s-60s. Thus, Veena's narratives are able to disrupt the dominant Symbolic, like that of the mid-century women's romances.

Veena Shanteshwar's novels fashioned women's subjectivity using a language that was similar to a feminist discourse that emerged in Karnataka in the 1970s. As suggested in the earlier chapter, the feminist discourse was produced through women's groups raising questions of domestic violence and sexual harassment and in feminist articles that were appearing in Kannada periodicals (Kripalani 1971; Srisa 1972; Shakuntala 1972; *Prajamata* 1971b; Niranjana 1972). How do we understand the popular feminist and popular non-feminist novels in this context?

The popular feminist novels were in continuity with the novels written by the second-generation writers in terms of the theme of estranged conjugality and in their inability to find a closure to couple formation. This is symbolised in the lines of Lanka's queen Mandodari in *Seethe, Rama, Ravana*, "A broken mirror, a broken marriage! However you put together the pieces, the faces are crooked" (1980, 205). But the novels articulate a feminist language in sharpening the conflict between the 'self' of the woman and *dharma*, the 'self' now seen as constrained by *dharma*. The novels by Usha Navaratnaram and Saisuthe take up

the aspect of romance of the mid-century women's novels and lay more emphasis on that.

We need to understand the shift that was being brought about in the writings of Usha Navaratnaram and Saisuthe not as producing regressive notions of femininity but as negotiating the women's question differently. Usha Navaratnaram's novels were also producing notions of equality and independence that can be located in-between a statist and a feminist discourse. They articulate the language of victimisation but not to refer to a notion of patriarchy. The problem is seen as an individual problem of the woman. Usha's novels produced a popular version of notions of equality and independence where the language of equality is naturalised and where one of the main issues that is emphasised is the importance of women having a job or career. [13]

This particular framing of subjectivity vis-à-vis equality can be seen in a woman's magazine like *Vanita* (started in 1978).[14] However, unlike Usha's novels

[13] The invocation of the popular notion of equality can be seen in the representation of the 'independent woman' in some of the 1970s Kannada films. The 'independent woman' is exemplified in the Kannada actress Aarti's character in films like S*hubhamangala* and *Hombisilu*. Though *Shubhamangala* was written by Vani, the changes made to the novel in its film version were more in tandem with the Usha Navaratnaram type of narrative of the 'independent' woman. The famous song from the film, "E shatamanada madari hennu, swabhimanada sahasi hennu, gulama nanalla…" means "I'm a girl of the century, a brave girl with a sense of respect; I'm not a slave…."

The link between women's popular literature and Kannada cinema that begins with the second-generation women novelists continues with the later popular women writers. Some of films that were based on Usha Navaratnaram's novels were *Hombisilu*, *Preetisi Nodu, Samarpane* and *Bandhana*. Her stories also appeared as photo comics in magazines. The story of the first series of photo comics, *Bete* (dir: Girish Kasaravalli), which was started in *Sudha* in 1985, was written by Usha Navaratnaram (See 8 December issue, 34-35). For a list of women's novels made into films, see Venkatalakshmi 1991, 182-183.

[14] During this time, there is a mention of three other women's periodicals that were in circulation, *Mangale*, *Stri* and *Stri Ratna* (*Vanita* 1979).

and the earlier periodicals, we sometimes find an articulation of a feminist language in addition to the state's language of equality in the magazine. Before we mark the difference between feminist and state language, we need to first recognise that there are overlaps between the two in terms of raising the question of women's subordination in society and also of equality. However, the difference might lie in how feminists, unlike the state, would seek to understand subordination as a structural problem that has to be located within patriarchy. Though the state, in the colonial and post-colonial periods, sought to rectify inequalities on the basis of gender, caste and religion, and translated this ideal into some of the legislations that it enacted, it was not a larger re-structuring that was wrought. It is perhaps in this sense that we need to understand how even when the state articulates 'women's issues', as it did in the 1950s, it does not make it a feminist state; it is still a patriarchal state.

If we look at the issues of *Vanita* during the year 1979, the emphases were on questions of the women's career, the problems of working women, the problem of dowry and attempts to improve women's status all around the world. However, along with this, *Vanita* would publish interviews of feminists like Anupama Niranjana and T. Usha and would also carry articles that spoke about the importance of *kumkuma* (vermilion worn on the forehead).[15] Though magazines like *Vanita* were providing space for different kinds of articulations of the women's question that ranged from feminist, liberal and traditionalist

[15] This is usually, though not only, worn by Hindu women. However, it is considered by especially north Indian Hindus to be an auspicious sign of being married.

perspectives, the woman who is framed in the writings of *Vanita* is the 'independent woman', though not necessarily feminist.

However, unlike earlier writers who needed to argue for equality, we see writers in periodicals like *Vanita* using the notion of equality as a given. The givenness of the notion can be seen even in the readers' letters, though what constitutes 'equality' differs in each letter. We find, for instance, a letter that questions the different standards of morality for the man and the woman. The letter responds to a short story, "Helpless", that talks about a woman who is unable to satisfy her husband sexually. The man pleads helplessness at the end of the story and says that since he cannot live without sex, he will have to seek another woman. In response to the story the reader asks the question whether it would have been all right for the woman to plead helplessness and seek another man in similar circumstances (Susheela 1979). If we compare this questioning with the situation that was dramatised in Triveni's novel *Sothu Geddavalu* (discussed in Chapter 3) where it was the narrator questioning the differential morals for men and women, it would seem as though the radical nature of the question for the time when Triveni's novel was written, and which had to be mitigated with the elaborate ritual of repentance that the woman protagonist had to perform in the novel, seems to have become naturalised by the late 1970s.

Sometimes we find a feminist language in the articulation of women's oppression. One of the letters to the editor of *Vanita* is an angry response to another letter that stated that there is no oppression of women and that it was

wrong for women to ask for equality. In the response the reader says it is only women who grow up in the fort of custom who feel there is no oppression, and that even if women are working along with men today, there is still a perception that she is inferior. In such a context, she raises the question whether it is wrong for a woman to say that she is a human being just like a man is. She argues that history has shown that there has always been women's oppression and asks when it was that women were given importance (Siddegowda 1979). However, even the feminist language of equality invoked in the magazines like *Vanita* does not particularly disrupt the developmental-modern language of the state.

An articulation of the perception of 'equality' different from that of the state and a feminist discourse is visible in the writings of Saisuthe. Her first novel, *Minchu* (1976) which was written around the time of the beginning of the International Women's Year (1975) and the establishing of women's groups articulates a different notion of 'self' by placing it within the frame of *dharma* and in opposition to modern notions of equality. Though she seemingly opposes the modern language of the state that is manifested in her rejection of the notion of 'equality', she employs the very same language while mirroring the divide between Indian tradition versus Western culture and in the celebration of an Indian tradition that is exemplified in a Vedic Hindu culture.

The nature of women's subjectivity constructed in the 1970s popular non-feminist novels posited a notion of self but not necessarily questioning the notion of *stridharma*. In fact, Saisuthe reinstates a normative notion of a *stridharma*.

Though Usha implicitly questions such a notion that prohibits the woman from working outside the house or suggests that she is unequal to the man, the notion of self is not posited to show patriarchy.

The statist language of the modern can be located in Saisuthe's invocation of 'tradition' and Usha's invocation of 'equality'. The narrative in these novels follows the conventional romance narrative of couple formation. If there are fractures in the conjugal relationship, the problem is located in the woman, in an individual sense. Even when Usha suggests that the woman is victimised, the victimisation is seen as something that can be remedied at an individual level. With Saisuthe, the absence of closure is because of the woman feeling inferior or because of the 'other' woman. If the problem is located in the man, it is because of his 'ego'. The woman is seen as the bearer of marriage and has to reform her husband or herself to bring about couple formation. The statist language of the modern that is manifest in the thematic is merely reinstated by the form of narrativisation. Even the mental conflict that is portrayed by both novelists is towards bringing about a closure to couple formation. The form of these narratives is not the hysterical narrative that we saw in relation to the 1950s-60s women's novels. The representation of conflict is very much contained within the modern language of the state and of the Symbolic.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Literature without representation by women is incomplete. Men might write about women's life, their problems and their inner self (*antaranga*) in many ways. But women see life from their own perspective. Her mind and her values are completely different from a man's. So, if only men write, we will get to only see one face of life. The other soft and beautiful face can be shown only by women. That is why it is important that women write in order to represent their problems to the world. We need to show that our lives are like this, say what is trivial for you is important to us and what is a game for you is a struggle for us. When women show this, men will at least understand women a little bit and not say, "We might be able to see a white crow but not a woman's inner self."

Triveni, in Her Speech "Mahileyara Sahitya Seve mathu Avara Samasyegalu" (Women Writing Literature and the Problems They Face) at the 38th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana, 1955.

Women's Writing

I will briefly return to the impulse of the thesis to respond to criticisms of popular women's fiction of the 1950s-60s as trivial and unworthy of critical attention. If the unworthiness of women's writing was established by Navya criticism, I suggested in Chapter 2 that the perception became prevalent in post-Navya criticism, both mainstream (Kurtakoti 1962; Amur 1994) and even those countering mainstream criticism such as feminists (Sumitrabai 2005).

Feminist writers and critics find fault with the second-generation women novelists for writing within a patriarchal framework and for creating a formula for popularity that was later used by women to gain money and readership in the market. Writer Veena Shanteshwar, for instance, sees none of the women novelists who came before her as adequately questioning tradition and morality. Reviewing this comment, Sumitrabai criticises Veena Shanteshwar for suggesting that the latter is inaugurating a new practice which does not have any precedent or history. The former then cites early twentieth century writers like Thirumalamba and Kalyanamma as those who discussed questions of women's reform. However, she dismisses second-generation women novelists like Triveni who she sees as being lured by the popular (Cited in Prabhavati 2002, 50-51). Here, Sumitrabai seems to accept a Navya characterisation of the second-generation women novelists in dismissing them. What I have attempted in the thesis is to re-read these women novelists, as a step towards producing a different history of women's writing in Karnataka.

Unlike Sumitrabai, some of the critics speak approvingly of the second-generation women novelists in suggesting that they inaugurated a new subject and style for women's writing. The critics argue that the novelists moved away not only from the portrayal of 'feminine ideals of duty and responsibility' by early twentieth century women writers but also from limited concerns of love and romance to represent the different facets of life (Nagaraj 1987; Srinath 1982). In addition to this argument, I showed in the thesis how readers responded very differently from mainstream criticism to the second-generation women novelists. I suggested that these novelists inaugurated a trend of popular writing, popular in terms of literature that had a wide circulation and readership, the trajectory of which I traced in 1970s popular feminist and popular non-feminist novels (Chapter 5). I also indicated in Chapter 3 that these writers were precursors to certain forms of narrativising in the women's film such as *Gejje Pooje*, *Bellimoda* and *Sharapanjara* directed by Puttanna Kanagal, though the specific ways in which the latter occurs is something that needs to be investigated. Having said this, my perspective on the significance of these writers is different from any of the above. I would like to suggest that these writers marked a turn in the history of Kannada literature in terms of creating a space for women's writing in the public domain.

If Navya and post-Navya critics like G. S. Amur and K. V. Narayana respectively are compelled to acknowledge and review women's writing, it might not be disputed that it is due to the impact of feminist criticism that began in the 1980s. However, what we need to recognise is that feminist articulations did not

mark a break from mid-century women's literature as much as having emerged from it. I have tried to show a continuity through examining the novels and advice books of the second-generation women writers. The critique of patriarchy made by feminists was beginning to be articulated by the second-generation women novelists. Questioning feminists who posit normative definitions of a politics, Shailaja Udachana, a North Karnataka writer, suggests that even though the language of feminism is a recent formation, we need to recognise different manifestations of 'protest' in earlier writings (1998).

We can see another kind of link between the second-generation women writers and those who came later if we understand the many struggles undertaken by the former. For instance, the Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha (Karnataka Women Writers Association) was formed in 1979 in an attempt to counter the various prejudices that women writers were facing. However, there is an earlier history to this attempt to confront criticism. In 1955 itself, during the Kannada Sahitya Sammelana, the annual literary conference, Triveni argued for a *mahila goshti* (women's forum) that would help bring together women writers and allow for discussions of women's literature until such time that it got legitimacy. Anupama talks about how she did not have the language to articulate why her writing was not merely 'sentimental' and had to be understood differently from male writing (Niranjana 1990, 28). Writer and critic H. S. Parvati mentions that with the Navya movement that dubbed women's writing that appeared in periodicals as lacking in depth and substance, she stopped writing (1998, 3). These writers felt that they needed to find another way of measuring women's

writing. All these experiences led them to form a group in 1966, which met every month hence for twenty years. It was this group that became the Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha (Niranjana 1990, 72-73). This association too cannot be seen as an isolated literary organisation since it has close links with women's groups, many of the members such as N. Gayatri, Sumitrabai and H. S. Parvati occupying both spaces.

The second-generation women novelists publicly responded to male critics who were criticising them. Anupama states the instances of critic Srikrishna Aalanahalli categorising women's literature as 'kitchen literature', Navya critic H. M. Nayak advising women not to compete with men and Navodaya writer Gopalkrishna Adiga asking women to confine themselves to creating babies. These criticisms were taken up by women writers in public forums such as newspapers and periodicals (Niranjana 1990, 85-99). These discussions created a legitimacy for women's literature and re-defined an understanding of women's writing as 'hollow' and 'lacking in substance'.

If mainstream literary histories have not acknowledged women's literature, except cursorily, there are recent studies that argue for such an inclusion and have attempted to write a history of women's literature (Vijayalakshmi 2002; Prabhavati 2002). It is important to keep in mind while writing such a history that we need to question the dominant characterisation of women writers that has become a part of feminist literary criticism. Just as I have tried to provide a different understanding of the second-generation women novelists, we need to

also interrogate understandings of early twentieth century writers like Thirumalamba as writing within a framework of 'social reform' and authors like Veena Shanteshwar as writing in the Navya mode. Such a re-reading is crucial because it is not enough to merely discover women writers who have been erased from history or even unwittingly read them through the lens of dominant criticism. Such a reading might not capture the relevance of the interventions that these women were making historically.

Another aspect that is now part of dominant criticism is that the second-generation women writers are characterised as middle class and upper caste. Though Anupama was not upper caste, she was part of an upwardly mobile, Sanskritised middle class. The caste-class location of these writers is invoked by some to suggest that their novels were merely preoccupied with the domestic realm (Narayana 1997a). Other critics have acknowledged their location, while adding that a mere mention of the location might not be an adequate critique of these writers (Parvati 1998). I would like to suggest that a caste critique is vital to understand the nature of modernity that the women writers produced. However, invoking the location of the women novelists does not serve as an argument for such a critique. We need to provide a more substantive argument and I suggest one below.

If we take the instance of caste, the second-generation women writers did not explicitly foreground the question of caste like dalit women writers such as Du. Saraswati today. Similarly the struggles of women writers from other

locations has made visible other issues, such as questions of tribe by B. T. Lalita Nayak, the representation of Muslim women by Sara Abubakar and Banu Mushtaq, the representation of the Hyderabad Karnataka region by Shailaja Udachana and the focus on sexuality by Veena Shanteshwar and Champavati. However, what I tried to show in Chapter 3 is that the narrative structure of the mid-century women's novels allowed for an identification across caste difference among women. I have not adequately worked out how we might analyse the advice writings or the 1970s popular women's novels in relation to the question of caste and community. A tentative answer in relation to the advice writings of Anupama, for instance, is that though her advice writings used a 'secular' language in interpellating women readers belonging to different religious communities, unlike her novels, the advice writings did not make the difference a constitutive part of the fashioning of conjugality. It is perhaps the articulation of the secular-developmental language that is "a direct message from the Symbolic" in the case of advice writings that does not allow the caste question to be foregrounded.

Today, there is a far greater visibility and legitimacy to women's writing in Kannada. Along with a vast body of feminist criticism that is available today, there are compilations of works of writers like Thirumalamba, Kalyanamma, Katyayini and Giribale from the past, an academic women's journal like *Mahila Adhyayana* which is brought out by the Kannada University in Hampi, and feminist newsletters such as *Achala* and *Manasa* brought out by women's organisations. What I have attempted to show is that we need to read the visibility

of women's writing today as coming out of the struggles of the second-generation women writers, just as the present struggles allow for a critique of those writers.

Afterthoughts

In this section I will reflect on the central questions that I intended to raise in the thesis and not only discuss what I have accomplished but also point out areas I have been unable to address and possible questions that need to be pursued further.

My main objective in the project was to map the formation of a Kannada modernity through examining the production of women's subjectivity in popular women's writings. I drew on theoretical insights and modes of analysis from literary and feminist scholarship to read the novels and advice books against a standard dismissal of the books and to give a new meaning to them. I examined these texts especially to understand their historical significance in the fashioning of women's subjectivity and conjugality. Two of the significant moves that I make in the project are to locate women as authors and producers of a Kannada modernity and to centrally place the popular as the site of the production of that modernity.

In examining how the question of subjectivity was raised in the novels and advice books, I have demonstrated in the thesis the notion of the *grihini* that was produced in the 1950s-60s women's novels and the 1950s-1970s advice writings.

This was in terms of both fashioning a notion of a *grihini* and a creation of a 'selfhood' or identity for her. I showed how this subjectivity was shaped within the language of the developmental-modern in the novels and advice writings. However, I suggested that the novels were able to fracture that language through the form of narrativisation. This was different from the advice books that tried to shape the *grihini*'s subjectivity within a scientific language without rupturing that language.

The question I would like to pursue is what was the history of the representations of the *grihini*, both in the past and in the future. Though I point to some of the differences between the early twentieth century and mid-century women's writings, I need to do a more detailed study. Were there ways in which even earlier representations created ruptures in the modernist language? If we take the example of the form of the psychological narrative, we can see a similar mode of narrativising in the short stories of Saraswatibai Rajwade (b. 1913). Is her use of the psychological narrative similar to that of the second-generation women novelists? If we take the instance of advice writings for women that appeared in journals like *Hitabodhini* and *Mahilasakhi* in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century, how did they fashion a *grihini*'s subjectivity? Were there representations other than those that emphasised the importance of a woman's choice in selecting her marriage partner, which I referred to in Chapter 1? Or how was 'choice' itself delineated? Further, would such an analysis of the earlier representations provide a different understanding of the production of a Kannada modernity?

In addressing the specific ways in which the 1950s-80s Kannada women writers addressed the question of conjugality, I suggested that the romance novels departed from the narrative of couple formation to dramatise conjugality. The women's advice literature too specifically focused on the issue of conjugality. If the advice writings fashioned new ways of thinking about conjugality as a relationship between equals, foregrounding questions such as female sexual pleasure, the novels showed the fracturing of modern notions of conjugality as a relationship of love and companionship. The public discourse of conjugality that was created by both these genres disrupts the construction of the conjugal space as 'private' and 'sanctimonious' (Chatterjee 1989). The breaking of the public-private divide in itself does not question the nationalist-modern language that introduces this divide. This is, for instance, the case with the advice writings by women. What is unique about the critique of conjugality dramatised by the women's novels is the breaking of the private-public divide in a manner that disrupts the language of the modern to create a Feminine Symbolic.

In relation to the narrative of couple formation, though in the thesis I have concentrated on the mid-century women's romance novels, I would like to analyse in future research the social novels of the time as a point of comparison to the romance novels. Though the social novels do not depart from the narrative of couple formation, what might be other nodes from which understand them? How do we, for instance, read the construction of women's subjectivity that is different from the romance novels in terms of not invoking the language of selfhood within a frame of equality? I also need to explore the shift to couple formation in the

‘non-feminist’ women’s novels of the 1970s. Though I do point to an emerging feminist discourse in Karnataka, this might not be a sufficient explanation. What might be other changes that were occurring, both in the terms of the state’s discourse and other discourses of the time?

I read the constructions of subjectivity and conjugality in the popular writings as symbolic of a Kannada modernity. In the thesis I located modernity in the establishment of the state and the formation of the citizen-subject. I asked in this context how the women writers produced a modernity from their location as women. Given that Kannada modernity and national modernity complemented each other in relation to the establishment of the nation-state and Karnataka-state, I suggested that the specificity of a Kannada modernity could be found in the nature of modernity that the women writers produced from their location as women subjects. I argued in the thesis that the modernity constructed by the women writers aligned with the state’s developmental modern language in the advice writings but interrupted that language in the novels. The form of the advice writings that used the scientific-developmental language of the state sometimes articulated notions of women’s pleasure. However, it did not rupture the statist language. In the novels I suggested that though the plot moves towards a desire for couple formation using the language of the developmental-modern, the ‘hysterical excess’ of the narrative disrupted the language.

One possible way of talking about the specificity of a Kannada modernity would be to compare the articulations of Kannada women writers with those from

other regions. Was their writing unique or different in the construction of women's subjectivity in the post-independence context? We know, for instance, that in Kerala the 1940s-50s was a period when there was a discourse around the woman that sought to regulate her body (Devika 1999). Otherwise, if we place the Kannada texts against existing knowledge about an Indian context, some of the developments in the context of Karnataka seem to *precede* similar developments at the national level. For instance, women's advice writings talking about sex-education and emphasising sexual pleasure in the early 1970s do not seem to have a precedent elsewhere.[1] The beginnings of an articulation of a feminist language is visible in Kannada fiction in the late 1960s in comparison with the emergence of a feminist discourse with the women's movement in India in the late 1970s (Kumar 1998; Shah and Gandhi 1993).

If a comparative study is one useful way of mapping the specificity of a Kannada modernity, another possible method is to examine how the state raised the women's question within its discourse of development. Though the emphasis of the Karnataka state, like the nation-state, was on development, what were the specific development initiatives, especially in relation to women, introduced by the state? It is possible that we might not find many divergences in the development programmes of a Karnataka state from the nation-state in the 1950s. However, it would point to the specific contours of the formation of a modernity

[1] The discourse of development emerges at the international level in the 1970s and is initiated at the national scene in the mid to late 1970s. In other regions like West Bengal, it is only in the late 1980s and 1990s that female sexuality and sex education seems to gain public visibility, for instance, in a popular magazine like *Sananda*, which was started in 1986. However, the nature of discussion is something that is yet to be investigated.

in Karnataka. Within this context, we need to understand the modernity produced by the middle class women writers as one of the many threads that constitute a Kannada modernity and investigate other threads produced from subject locations of dominated castes or religious communities. What might be interesting to pursue further is to trace back the trajectory of the discourse of development in Karnataka. Since even the Princely Mysore state, which was under a monarch, centrally articulated the language of modernisation, what were continuities and discontinuities with the establishment of a democratic state, with Indian independence, in Karnataka?

Though the thesis has almost exclusively focussed on a close reading of the novels and other writings in order to map a Kannada modernity, I see this as a first and necessary step before I can go on to examine the production of the modernity and subjectivity on other sites of cultural production and from other subject positions as I mentioned above. In relation to the women's writings themselves, apart from the publishing and circulation of these books, which I briefly sketch in the project, a closer look at reading practices and finding ways of integrating such practices with the textual analysis of the novels and advice books would provide another axis to understanding the women's texts.

One of the questions I have not addressed adequately in the thesis has to do with the contexts of the women's writings, both of the 1950s-60s and the 1970s. While I have addressed the question of modernity in terms of the founding of the state and the formation of the citizen-subject, there were arguably other

contexts for these writings. For instance, the 1950s was a time when the public sector industries, such as the watch, telephone and insurance companies, were set up in cities like Bangalore. Men and women migrated to the city from villages and smaller towns in order to find new jobs. Middle class women were employed in these industries. It was in such a context that discussions about 'working women' were published in popular magazines. Another important point of discussion was the emergence of the nuclear family. One of the early feminist writers, H. S. Parvati, writes that the nuclear family emerged as a result of changing socio-economic conditions such as men going out of their home towns in search of employment and women unable to adjust to their in-laws' families because of being educated and getting married at a later age than before (1972). Anupama locates the breaking up of the joint family in what she sees as an 'industrial revolution' created by the establishment of public sector units in Bangalore (Niranjana 1973a, 152). Even if the nuclear family might not have emerged in the 1950s, the discussions gesture to a general perception of change that we need to understand. I initially kept these contexts out of the thesis considering that they cannot be placed on the same plane as the establishment of the state while thinking about the production of a Kannada modernity. However, I now recognise that they are important in providing a sense of the social changes that were occurring during the time.

My attempt in the project in relation to the question of the popular was to trace a genealogy of the popular in Karnataka. Unlike an understanding of Navya criticism in the 1960s as inaugurating the distinction between the popular and the

literary (Sridharamurthy 1995), I suggested that the distinction began to be made in the mid-1950s itself with the introduction of pocketbook publishing and the setting up of libraries that made the novels available at low prices. However, I marked the hegemonic nature of Navya criticism in setting up a critical apparatus that categorised the mid-century women's writing as popular within a characterisation of the popular as not possessing any literary qualities. This distinction between the literary and the popular is part of literary criticism even today. However, what is interesting is that the literary, even the high literary like the Navya, has always intersected with popular print, such as newspapers, magazines and periodicals. Some of the major literary debates, such as what constituted Pragathisheela (Progressive) literature, were publicly conducted in newspapers and not carried out among a select group of writers. Renowned Navya and later Bandaya writer P. Lankesh also ran a Kannada tabloid, *Lankesh Patrike*, in the 1980s-90s. In the 1990s, a feminist poet, Pratibha Nandakumar wrote a column in another Kannada tabloid, *Hi Bangalore*. In future work, I would like to explore the ways in which the literary and the popular are tied to each other in the Kannada cultural context.

What is also interesting is that within a context where Navya criticism dismissed women's literature, the writer-editor Lankesh encouraged women writers like Vaidehi and Sara Abubakar. How do we understand this phenomenon? Is it again a particular kind of women's writing that gets legitimacy? Is it a certain notion of what is 'aesthetics' and what is 'politics' that allows for the visibility of these writers—Vaidehi for not explicitly 'arguing for or

against anything' but exploring the 'complexities of human life', Sara Abubakar for her critique of Muslim patriarchy and Pratibha Nandakumar for her 'bold' writing?

While discussing the popular I would like to ask whether the 1980s marked the end of the era of popular print with the beginnings of television? It is not as if popular literature has exhausted itself and has been replaced by television. Saisuthe's novels, for instance, still have a wide circulation. However, there is a new relationship between popular literature and television. Some of the Kannada television serials like *Mayamruga* (1999-2000, T. N. Seetharam), that gained popularity, are now being brought out as novels.[2] With periodicals like *Sudha*, it was not with the 1980s as much as the 1990s that their circulation fell.[3] What might be the reasons for this decline is a question that still needs to be asked.

Let me conclude with a note on what the writing of this thesis has meant to me. Central to this journey has been my engagement with the question of the popular and trying to comprehend what the mid-century women authors accomplished through their writing. From an intellectual and academic engagement with the texts, which is indeed an experience of 'pleasure', I moved to an understanding of a different kind of 'pleasure', one that is shared by the readers of the popular women's novels. This was important because it not only

[2] The novel *Mayamruga* (Illusory Animal) is authored by Seetharam T. N. et al. 2000.
[3] See Appendix 7 for the circulation figures of the weekly periodical *Sudha* and that of the monthly periodical *Mayura* brought out by the same publisher, The Printers (Mysore) Private Limited.

motivated my journey but also showed me a way of relating to the women's novels and advice books outside of both, a mainstream point of view and a dominant feminist perspective. I was able to understand the struggle of the women writers in trying to find ways of depicting women's experience. The excerpt from the speech by Triveni that I quote in the beginning of the chapter, for me, emphasises not so much the difference between men and women as the search for a language to represent that difference. Further, the medium of the popular did not trivialise the endeavour to portray women's experience but added a new dimension to it. The act of reading that made possible the readers' identification with the novels, as much as the act of women writing the novels, was central to the creation of a public discourse on questions of women's subjectivity and conjugality. In the project I have attempted to lay out the significance of this discourse and through that to reposition the value of women's writing and the popular in our theoretical grid.

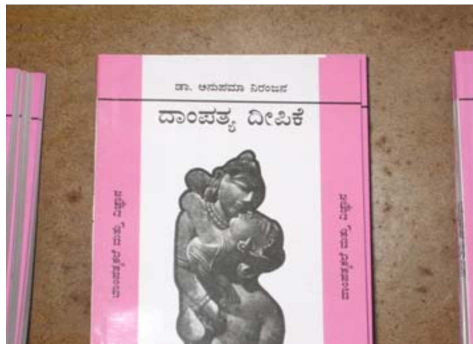
Appendix 1

The entrance of Gita Book Agency, Bangalore with a list of newly published books and some of the covers of those books.

Appendix 2

D. V. K. Murthy's publishing house in Mysore that specialises in publishing women's novels

2.1 Front view of D. V. K. Murthy's publishing house

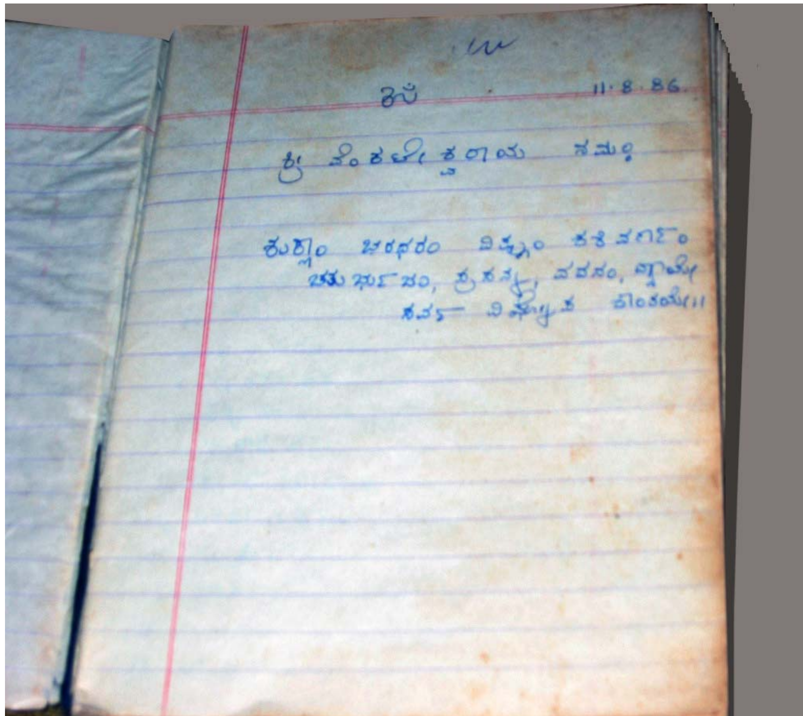


2.2 Anupama's *Dampatya Deepike* (Conjugality Manual) at the display

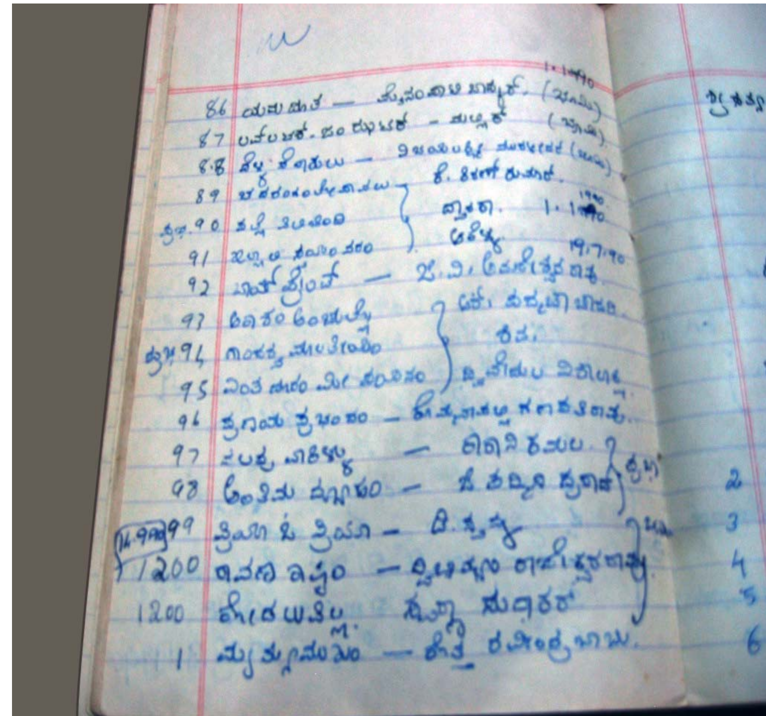
2.3 The display at D. V. K. Murthy's publishing house

Appendix 3

Pages from a notebook of one of the readers of popular novels with a list of books she has read.



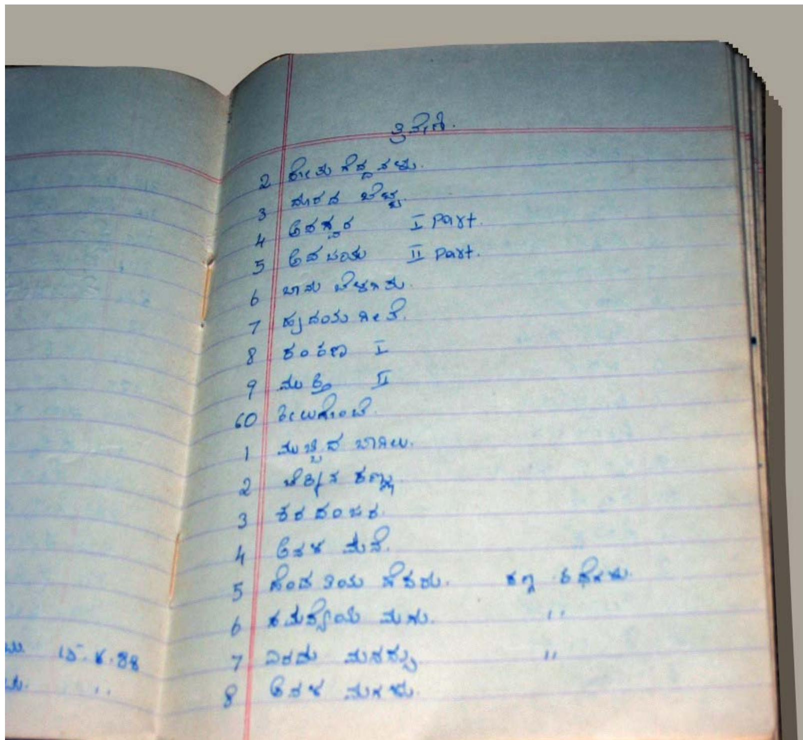
3.1 The opening page with the date of starting the book list (11-08-1986)



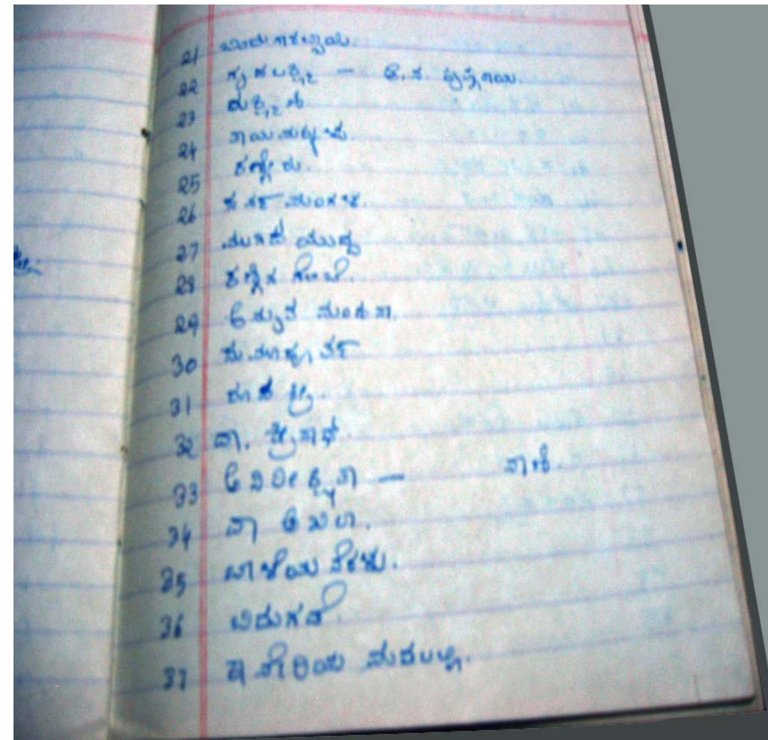
3.2 The record of the one thousand and two hundredth title in the book list (14-09-1990)

Appendix 3 (continued)

Pages from a notebook of one of the readers of popular novels with a list of books she has read.



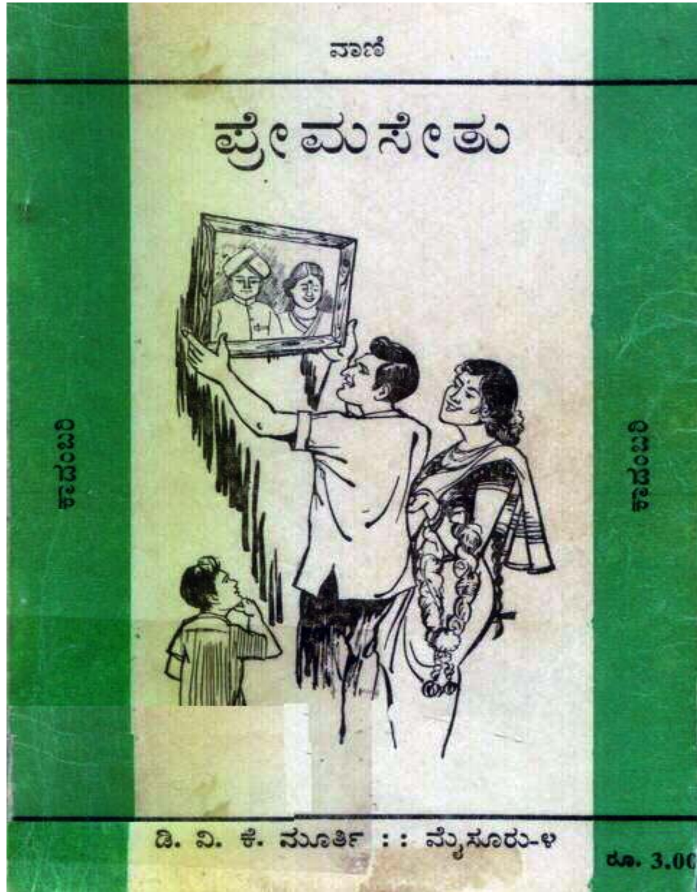
3.3 The page showing some of the entries under Triveni's name.

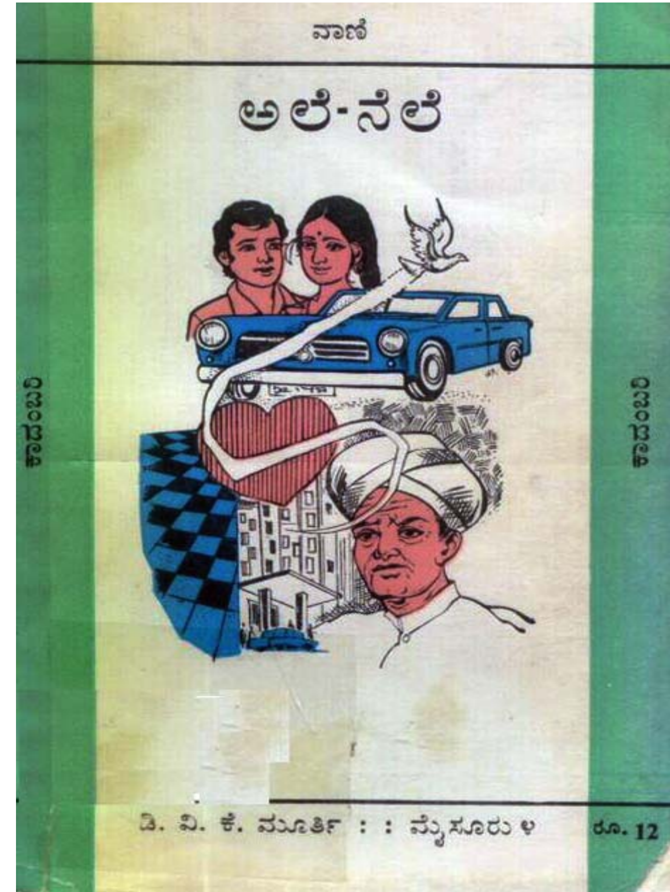


3.4 The page displaying some of the titles of Vani's novels.

Appendix 4

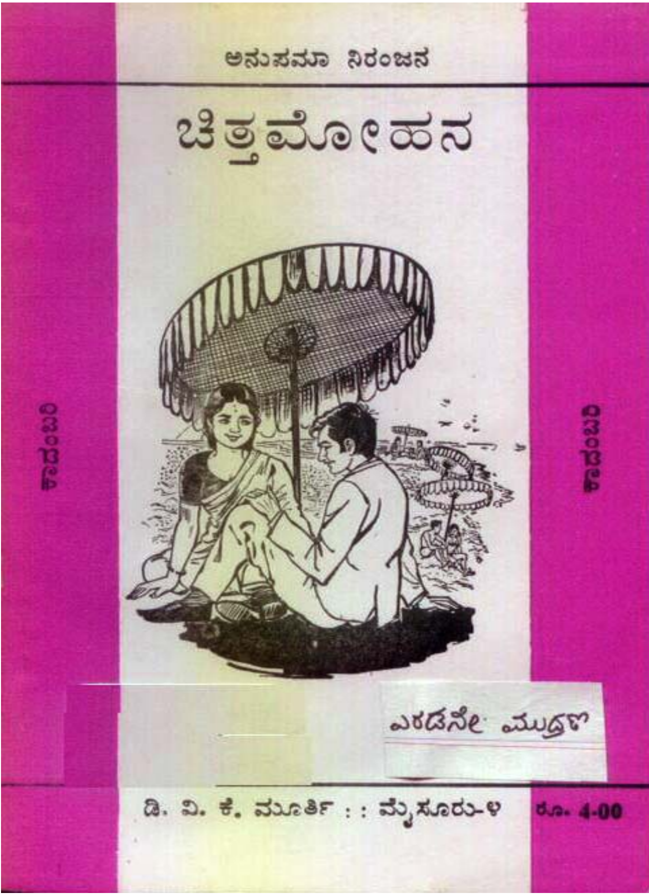
Front covers of Vani’s novels that represent the couple.





Appendix 4 (continued)

Front covers of Anupama's novels that represent the couple.



Appendix 5

Sketches accompanying the poems of Anandakanda, depicting the modern couple and conjugal love in the periodical *Jayanthi* 1938.

ಪ್ರೀತಿ ಪೌರ್ಣಿಮಾ

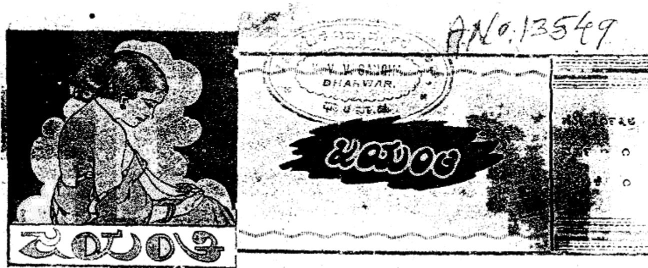
— ಆನಂದಕಂದ —

ನೋಡು, ಬರುವ ಸುಗ್ಗಿಯಾಟ !

— ಆನಂದಕಂದ —

Appendix 5 (continued)

Sketches accompanying the poems of Anandakanda, depicting the modern couple and conjugal love in the periodical *Jayanthi* 1938.

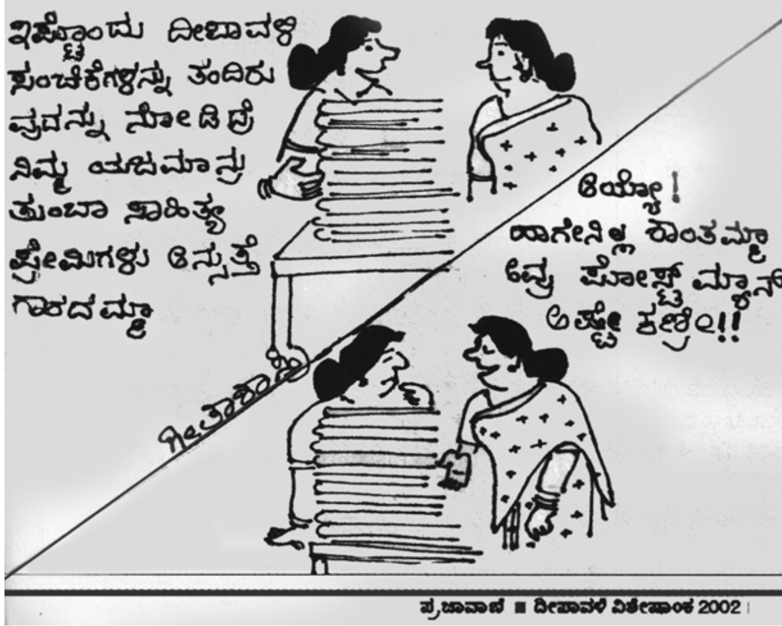


ನಡೆ ಸಾಗು ಜೊತೆಗೂಡಿ

ನನ್ನ ಗಾಂಧಾರಿಗೆ:

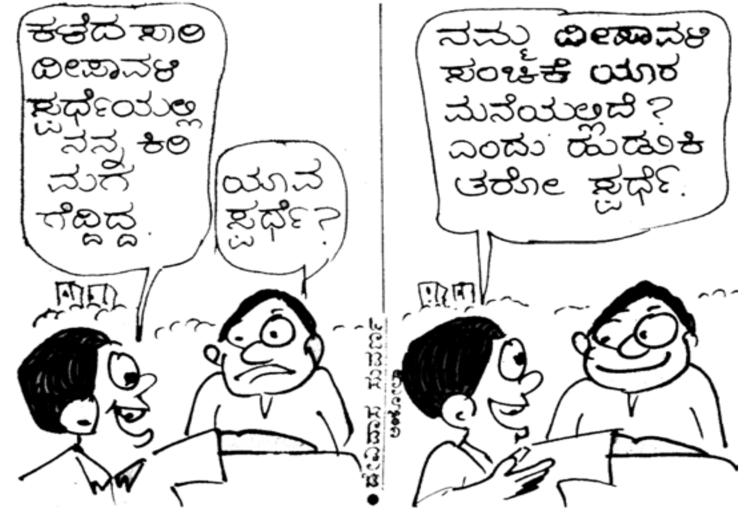
Appendix 6

Cartoons referring to the popularity of Kannada periodicals.



Shantamma: Sharadamma, your husband has brought so many Deepavali Special Issues! Looks like he is a literature lover.
Sharadamma: *Ayyo*, nothing like that Shantamma, he's only a postman.

Prajavani, Annual Deepavali Issue, 2002, 213



Man: My youngest son won last year's Deepavali competition.
Friend: Which competition?
Man: The competition for finding out in whose house is our Deepavali Special Issue?

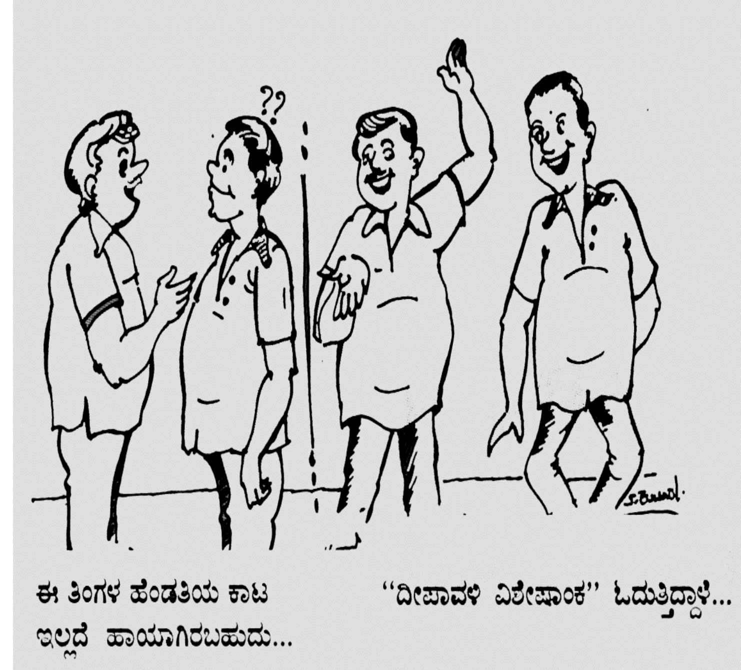
Prajavani, Annual Deepavali Issue, 2005, 262

Appendix 6 (continued)

Cartoons referring to women as both producers and consumers of Kannada periodicals.

My dear, just because you have won the prize for the Ugadi story competition, it is not right that you tell the child that story instead of the story of the prince and princess…

Sudha, Annual Ugadi Issue 2005, 226



This month I am relieved of my wife's nagging…
She is reading the Deepavali Special Issue…

Udayavani, Annual Deepavali Issue 2002, 280

Appendix 7

The circulation figures of the weekly Kannada periodical *Sudha* and that of the monthly Kannada periodical *Mayura* brought out by The Printers (Mysore) Private Limited from 1965-2000.

YEAR	PERIOD	SUDHA	MAYURA
1965	January-June	20,565	-----
	July-December	30,930	-----
1968	January-June	66,471	27,774
	July-December	67,043	27,008
1970	January-June	80,616	28,362
	July-December	80,612	30,203
1975	January-June	1,01,022	47,757
	July-December	95,224	49,346
1980	January-June	1,63,102	80,531
	July-December	1,70,658	81,823
1985	January-June	1,49,162	87,062
	July-December	1,61,558	89,128
1990	January-June	1,63,247	76,620
	July-December	1,65,493	79,318
1992	January-June	1,52,163	72,887
	July-December	1,50,781	74,733
1994	January-June	1,52,108	68,911
	July-December	1,48,141	65,709
1996	January-June	1,34,296	60,807
	July-December	1,39,994	61,589
1998	January-June	1,41,991	57,541
	July-December	1,30,494	55,260
2000	January-June	1,04,752	47,914
	July-December	94,843	44,889

Courtesy: The Printers (Mysore) Private Limited

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