

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine the ways in which an ideal Indian woman (citizen) is constituted in this genre through a study of the women protagonists' self-fashioning with regard to globalised metropolitan India, and the implications of these for contemporary Indian feminism. The 15 novels considered here evinced that the women fashion themselves as ideal Indian women (citizens) through an ethical code that consists of the values of hard work and merit in the worksphere, of a liberated femininity coupled with respectability in the realm of sexuality and a non-victimhood defined in opposition to the mothers. This ethical code posits them as 'secular' and 'progressive' citizens believing in and deserving of 'new India'. The role of feminism in this scenario is to help the un-developed, rural, un-English educated women while global cities make it possible for the privileged women protagonists to live freely with financial and sexual freedom. In this sense, the genre sustains the idea of a globalisation-driven India as promising freedom and equality through the images of liberated Indian women.

One of the purposes of this research was to develop and explicate a method through which women's literature could be read politically since it was believed that the continued separation of women and men into the categories and realms of the social and the political respectively is part of a patriarchal trend that continues in social, official and academic discourses. As I discussed in detail in Chapter 1, I have attempted to use the categories of identity, history and nation, which have come to mark the 'political', in a study of women's literature in English in India here using a combination of feminism and cultural materialism. I have also analysed how women's images in the genre contribute to the resistance and the maintenance of structures of domination.

Here in this conclusion, I would like to mark out some of the limitations in this research, recommendations for future research and some philosophical issues that the research raises which require separate detailed studies. I would like to begin with the fifteen novels that this research has considered. Although these novels have been selected from the beginning of this genre in 2004 with Swati Kaushal's *Piece of Cake* and then beyond

up to 2013, there have been many more novels within this period, which have not been included in this thesis. Women's popular fiction in English in India has also expanded significantly since 2013 with women protagonists being located in other locales, time periods and occupations (as briefly discussed in Chapter 2). Thus more work is required on the genre as a whole and also within the subgenres that contemporary women's popular fiction can now be divided into.

Within the genre that this research is based on, popularly known as 'Indian chick lit', this research has also not been able to address issues of production, consumption and genre theory. While studies on the production of this genre can contribute by providing insights on, for instance, how publishers and commissioning editors assess the demands of the market and the criteria on the basis of which they select writers and novels, those on consumption can enrich the field with reader responses, which may vary across classes and regions. Studies on the production and consumption of this genre can thus help answering questions such as: How is this fiction 'sold': what markers (words and cover images) does it create for its marketing? What kinds of readership, authorship and publishing are imagined for this fiction? What is the publicity and critical reception it receives? How is this fiction marketed? What is the profile of the readership of this fiction and their reasons for reading this fiction? How does reading this fiction affect them? What is it that appeals to them in this fiction? A study based on genre theory, on the other hand, can help in understanding the ways in which language operates in this genre, for instance, and also shared social expectations that are reflected and produced through the genre.

In the novels I consider, the active self-fashioning on the part of the women into a particular kind of woman citizen is what makes it a novel endeavor. This is an attempt by women themselves to define themselves in relation to the nation. This is not to say that such attempts have not been made before in Indian English literature but that this is perhaps the first time that these self-imaginings by women have become part of popular culture, thus mass-marketing and re-producing these images at a grand scale. The representation of women in these novels can thus be read as a response by women to the changing face of globalised metropolitan India as well as the images produced in the mass media of 'contemporary Indian woman'.

This research has also highlighted the need for more focused work on women's work in the globalised services sectors, especially qualitative work, to understand the appeal

of the private sector better to women who want to assert their freedom. While there are a few studies on women in the IT sectors and in banking (as discussed in Chapter 3), there is a severe lack of work on the advertising and journalism sectors, for instance. The genre of women's urban fiction has served as a starting point for such a qualitative understanding. Moreover, this genre focuses on single women. As the existing studies illustrate, a number of women working in these sectors quit work after marriage or when pregnant. This evinces the need for studies on the reasons for this phenomenon, focusing on the role of the (nuclear and/or joint) marital family and the role of the husband, especially with regard to domestic and childcare responsibilities in connection with professional ones, and the reasons for the continuity of gender codes within this scenario.

This genre is also indicative of a change in the role that the upper middle-class (natal) family plays in these women's lives as providing support. This requires more study, especially with respect to the factors that may have contributed to this change. I would thus like to emphasize the need for feminist studies on privileged women in conjunction with those on marginalised women in India. 'Heterosexuality', for instance, is still a fraught domain especially with regard to the concepts of women's consent, sexual desire and sexual practices. Studies on sexuality then need to attend to heterosexuality along with queer sexualities. Similarly, feminist studies on women's work need to attend to the globalised sectors where women work. The research has also illustrated the need for studies on a better understanding of the reasons for the popularity of globalisation and for a globalisation-driven idea of 'new India'.

I would also like to mark some of the philosophical issues that this research raises, which I have not been able to address in detail. The first has to do with the relation between aesthetics and politics, a debate that was initiated by what has come to be called the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory in the 1930s and continued into the 1980s with Cultural Materialism and is reflected at present in the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1993) and Jacques Rancière (2011, 2013). While I have explicated this relation in the study of women's urban fiction, I have not been able to particularly build on the philosophical debate.

The choice of the method used in this research was supposed to explore the connections between (women's) subjectivity, their sense of subjecthood and their identity. I have attempted to draw a connection between these and feminist politics in my analysis. The

existence of an ethical code, which is illustrated through this genre, in the constitution of women's subjecthood and its relation with their identity and feminist politics throws up the second philosophical issue, which is the relation between ethics and politics, particularly with regard to the question of whether a particular set of ethics determine a particular kind of politics. This can also be marked as the relation between subjectivity and (feminist-social) change. Feminist theory has illustrated that the realm of the rational is constructed in opposition to emotions (subjectivity), which are attributed to men and women respectively. At the same time, politics as a category is attributed to the male domain as well. In such a scenario, drawing a connection between ethics and politics becomes an epistemological breach, building on the debate on the attribution of ethics to rationality or subjectivity.³⁴ This is further complicated by the idea of rationality being constituted through language, which, as feminists like Dale Spender (1980) have illustrated, is also patriarchal. The question thus is the kind of relation(ship) we can imagine between subjectivity, ethics and feminist politics.

I hope that this thesis has been able to mark the importance of popular fiction, particularly, contemporary women's popular fiction in English in India as texts which can be productively explored for their representations of women's agency. This genre has served to bring the category of the single woman as well as the woman as an individual citizen into the popular imagination. It offers a very significant rendering of the contemporary Indian feminist subject even though the women portrayed may not claim feminism. Working on this thesis has led me to better understand the ways in which feminism figures in the popular imagination, especially by privileged women. This behooves the question of the relationship that feminism can set up with privileged ('liberated') women, who may be able to contribute to feminist transformation. I have tried to provide a critique of the way in which this genre deals with notions of freedom and liberation, while acknowledging the power of the popular. I believe that such fiction needs much more exploration, and would benefit from further and diverse interpretations, given its place in contemporary popular writing.

³⁴ See "Ethics and Rationality" by Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April 1993), pp. 151-161.