

Beyond Victimhood: Caste, Gender, and the Subversion of Cozy Detective Fiction in Tarquin Hall's *the Case of the Love Commandos*

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Abstract

This article examines the manner in which the British writer Tarquin Hall represents major Indian female in his detective novel *The Case of the Love Commandos*, drawing upon the critical lenses of postcolonial feminism and intersectionality. While colonial and nationalist discourses have often reduced Indian women to passive victims of patriarchal oppression, Tarquin Hall's novel offers a more nuanced portrayal that foregrounds the complex intersections of gender, caste, and social status. The study argues that Hall appropriates and reworks conventions of the cozy detective novel to expose systemic inequalities embedded in contemporary Indian society while simultaneously underscoring women's resilience and agency. Through an analysis of characters such as Tulsi, Kamlesh, Facecream, and Mummy-ji, the article illustrates how the novel contests essentialist representations of Indian womanhood by depicting diverse experiences shaped by caste hierarchies and patriarchal structures. By integrating postcolonial feminist concerns into the investigative plot, Hall transforms the detective narrative into a vehicle for social critique. Ultimately, the article contends that *The Case of the Love Commandos* subverts the conservative tendencies traditionally associated with cozy detective fiction and gives testimony to the capacity of contemporary detective fiction to engage critically with questions of gender, caste, and social justice in India.

Keywords: *cozy detective fiction, postcolonial feminist criticism, intersectionality caste, Indian women*

1. Introduction

Cultural perceptions of Indian women have often been marred with essentialism. To legitimize British colonial endeavours in India, British colonial channels of representation have often constructed the image of Indian women as invisible and passive victims of patriarchal oppression (Singh 31–32). During the nationalist movement, Indian women came to be culturally represented as the epitome of national identity and indigenous values. The model of the New Indian Woman, defined by chastity, submissiveness, and self-sacrifice, was produced (Lopez 202). In the wake of Independence, and despite the crucial role they had played in the nationalist struggle, Indian women were required to return to their domestic roles (Lopez 206). In postcolonial India, in spite of the expanding women's engagement in the public sphere, particularly among the urban middle class, dominant social norms continue to prioritize domesticity and motherhood (Lopez 207). Against this historical and ideological background, Tarquin Hall's detective novels, which are set in twenty-first-century contemporary India, constitute a problematic site for analyzing female representation, as they are written by a British author and belong to detective fiction, a genre traditionally dominated by Western and masculinist perspectives. Accordingly, drawing upon the critical insights of postcolonial

feminist literary criticism, particularly intersectionality, this article explores the major ways in which Hall deploys the conventions of detective fiction in his portrayal of his Indian female characters in *The Case of the Love Commandos*. It demonstrates that Hall's novel gives insight into the diverse struggles undergone by many Indian women while emphasizing their agency against oppressive structures at the same time. Hence, this article will proceed into three main directions. First, an attempt to provide required contextualization will be offered by giving an idea about Tarquin Hall's detective writing, the cozy golden age subgenre, and the debate around the issue of cultural authenticity. Second, some critical insights about postcolonial feminist literary criticism will be foregrounded. Finally, it will explore how the generic framework of detective fiction is employed by Hall in the characterization of major Indian female characters in the novel under study.

2. A General Contextual Background

Tarquin Hall is a British journalist and writer who currently lives and publishes in India. He is best known for creating the fictional Punjabi detective Vish Puri. Hall's detective series, which were inaugurated in 2008, has achieved significant popularity and has been translated into multiple languages (Meyer 515). In the context of this study, emphasis is placed on Hall's work *The Case of the Love Commandos*. Unlike other detective fiction writers whose works have been extensively examined, Hall's novels remain underexplored in academic scholarship. Neele Meyer's *Glocalizing Genre Fiction in the Global South: Indian and Latin American Post-Millennial Crime Fiction* (2017) offers one of the few discussions of Hall's work, referring to the contribution of *The Case of the Love Commandos* to illuminate broader trends in post-millennial English-language crime fiction. However, Meyer's treatment remains limited to genre characteristics, leaving the critical analysis of Hall's representation of women largely unaddressed. Consequently, this lack of scholarly attention represents a notable omission in the study of multicultural detective fiction and underscores the relevance of the present research which seeks to examine how Hall's novels utilize major formulas of detective fiction to portray Indian women within intersecting frameworks of caste, gender, and patriarchy. To achieve this end, it is crucial to give a glimpse about the detective genre in general, and about the golden age or cozy paradigm in particular.

In broad terms, a detective story can be defined as a "story in which the principal action and focus of interest is the investigation of a crime or apparently criminal enigma by a detective figure, either professional or amateur" (Baldick 94). It is generally agreed that the detective genre was invented by the American writer Edgar Allan Poe in the first half of the nineteenth century. Poe is recognized for creating many of the now established conventions of the detective form. Since then, the detective fiction genre has developed in many ways, proving to be a highly dynamic genre. While it has been an unlikely subject for scholarly interest for a long time, it has been increasingly gaining momentum since the second half of the twentieth century: a wealth of academic literature has emerged on the history, the typology, the ideological frameworks, and the social contexts in which the detective novel is situated (Pyrhönen 46-48).

The novel under focus in this article belongs to the Golden Age or the cozy subgenre of detective fiction. In broad terms, golden age detective fiction refers to a body of detective novels that began to emerge in the 1920s, in the interwar period. In her book *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction*, Lee Horsley maintains that the golden age of detective fiction was "[a] period of highly

stylized crime writing, it has also been labelled 'cozy', reflecting the preference for plots in which a comfortably recognizable pattern (a highly wrought version of the death-detection-explanation model) is acted out in a familiar domestic setting, with the restoration of reassuring orderliness guaranteed" (38). Golden Age detective writing is exemplified by the work of writers such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. The fictional sleuths created by such writers are characterized by their use of unique feminine and non-traditional tactics of detection such as intuition and gossip, which represents a major departure from the emphasis on the heroic scientific thinking associated with the male detective hero found in earlier classical detective novels (Ackershoek 120). The feminization of the golden age novels was consolidated by equipping female characters with agency. As a matter of fact, in the 1920s and 1930s, because of many factors such as women's undertaking of men's responsibilities during the war years, women in Golden-age detective fiction started to play active roles as investigators (Ackershoek 120). Besides, the golden age of detective fiction is characterized by its exclusive type of setting. Secluded country houses, small or enclosed communities like little villages or islands are recurring locales in Golden Age detective novels (Worthington 117). What is of paramount importance to note is that the restricted setting of golden age detective fiction goes hand in hand with its socially enclosed nature. Indeed, Golden Age detective novels are set within "the restricted milieu of fashionable society" (Horsley 37). Setting focus on the upper middle classes, such novels represent a "hierarchically ordered world" (Messent 128). In such a world, the motives of crimes are basically personal and private. Thus, at first glance at least, there is almost little reference to the existence of any injustices or inequalities resulted from the broader social system. (Messent 128). As explained by Susan Rowland, "[c]ozies feel 'cozy' because they end in a restoration of a relatively tranquil social group whose values are strengthened by one of their on solving the murder" (158). In such a manner, it can be said that cozies fulfil a restorative and a reassuring function, which shows the conservative nature of the form (Messent 15).

The fact that Hall is a British author who uses the cozy golden age subgenre to write a detective novel set in India brings to the fore the ongoing critical debate around the question of cultural authenticity. Indeed, on the one hand, many scholars hold the firm belief that only an insider can produce culturally authentic literature, which implies that white authors who write about other ethnicities and cultures are likely to create literature which contains stereotypical images and racist undertones (Cai 37). For example, in her book *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction*, the critic Maureen. T. Reddy argues that many white American writers fail to represent authentic ethnic American investigators despite their good intentions (189). She explains that the genre of detective fiction is "irremediably a white genre dependent on white readers", and hence, it is nearly impossible to avoid repeating and reproducing the white racist ideology that forms the basis of the genre (172). On the other hand, according to other critics such as Doreen Rappaport and Joseph Bruchac, an author can write about a culture outside their own with authenticity if they carry out thorough research and have personal experiences within the culture they write about (Oswald and Smolen 7). Other critics maintain that empathy is the most important factor that counts when writing about a particular culture (Oswald and Smolen 7). A major goal of what follows is to go beyond the simplistic insider/outsider dichotomy and to illustrate the fact that Hall can write across race, ethnicity, and gender in order to produce positive images of Indian women. To do so, focus will be set now on establishing the necessary theoretical and conceptual framework of this paper.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Part:

Postcolonial feminism represents a useful critical framework that serves to examine the representation of women in Hall's *The Case of the Love Commandos*. In broad terms, postcolonial feminism extends the preoccupation of Black feminism with the necessity of tackling questions of race and cultural difference in feminist arguments. Indeed, the emergence and the development of Black feminism in the mid-1980s and the 1990s came as an oppositional reaction to patriarchy as well as to white western feminism (Nayar 109). As a matter of fact, postcolonial feminist criticism accentuates location and cultural difference among women, underlining how spirituality, language, and sexuality or motherhood are essentially context-based. In short, the assumption that the Western model of the feminine or feminism is the standard one is a major idea that postcolonial feminism seeks to contest (Nayar 113).

Postcolonial feminist analysis also underscores the significance of intersectionality. Grounded in Black feminist political activism, the concept of intersectionality is deployed in a wide range of contexts and disciplines for various political projects and has become the new buzzword in feminist criticism (Bartels et al. 156). It was first introduced by the critic Kimberlé Crenshaw who maintains that examining women's experiences by the use of a single-axis framework is actually a distortion of those experiences (Crenshaw 139). For her, women's experiences of discrimination are actually determined by multiple and intersecting factors. The critical concept of intersectionality, hence, is based on the firm belief in the urgent necessity of taking "different forms of oppression and their interplay into account without prioritizing any one form of oppression over the other, which signals a move away from additive models (like the idea of triple jeopardy/triple oppression used in earlier forms of feminist analysis)" (Bartels et al. 156). To put it succinctly, several axes of social inequality and oppression, such as gender, race, class, caste, ethnicity, or sexuality to name only a few variables, are highlighted in intersectional analyses (Bartels et al. 156). By serving as a critical tool to study women's lived identities and experiences as intertwined with systems of domination, intersectionality serves to challenge traditional perceptions of gender and oppression, offering a more profound and a more inclusive understanding of how power dynamics function in society (PHI Learning Editorial Team 69).

The feminist notion of Intersectionality is essential to examine the women's experience and the system of patriarchy in the Indian context. As attested by Ananya Sharma, "[t]heorizing patriarchy in the Indian setting is much more complex than the Western model of patriarchy, which frames it as a binary gender issue" (1437). Indeed, patriarchy in India is profoundly entrenched within its social, cultural, religious, and economic structures, affecting gender roles and expectations for centuries. It "works through an intersectional lens – it is not merely about male dominance but about the layered oppression that women face due to their caste, class, religion, and regional identity" (Sharma 1437). Hence, the Indian woman's experience cannot be reduced into a singular category of oppression, but must be understood through the intricacies of caste, class, and gender (Sharma 1437).

The peculiar nature of Indian Patriarchy is essentially pivoted upon the caste system. According to *Social Issues of India*, "India is primarily a caste based society and caste is perhaps the dominant form of social stratification in India even today" (199). A caste is regarded as a 'closed system' of social hierarchy where groups, often divided on the grounds of their

occupation, rigorously followed codes of social interaction dictated by tradition. Broadly speaking, there are four major castes and the Brahmins are considered as being at the top of the social hierarchy. (Jodhka 243-244). The people who are called “Dalits” perform the most menial tasks, which relegates them to lowest ranks of society. Indeed, the term “Dalits” itself means “oppressed, downtrodden, or broken” (Kanmony ix). Notions of purity and pollution lie at the core of the caste system. The ritual ‘status’ of a group defined who they could interact with and who they could not. Hence, the ideas of untouchability, avoidance and discrimination in everyday social life were essential to caste (Jodhka 243). Today, most communities no longer pursue the jobs historically linked to their caste. Nonetheless, inequalities between upper and lower castes remain pronounced: caste remains a powerful marker of social inequality in contemporary India (Jeffrey and Harriss 20).

Having elucidated the theoretical and conceptual framework of this article, focus will be now set on the ways in which Hall uses the main formulas of the cozy novel in his depiction of female characters his novel *The Case of the Love Commandos*.

4. Analytical part

4.1. Subverting the Socially Enclosed World of the Cozy Novel

Examining the representation of major female characters in Hall’s *The Case of the Love Commandos* from a postcolonial feminist perspective discloses that the novel departs from major generic conventions of the cozy novel which are mainly its socially enclosed nature and its conservative ideological scope. As a matter of fact, as mentioned earlier, the classical cozy or golden age novel, spatially enclosed settings such as the isolated house or the village serve to underscore social homogeneity and harmony. A close feminist postcolonial reading of the novel under focus reveals that Hall adheres to generic rules by including spatially enclosed settings such as the isolated house and the rural village of Govind. Yet, what is of paramount significance to note is that such places are utilized mainly to bring the issue of caste into the fore and to give insight into the different struggles of major Indian female characters, highlighting the diversity of their experiences across gender, caste and class lines.

The suffering that many Indian upper caste women may endure is highlighted in Hall’s detective novel through the representation of the character of Tulsi. In the opening scene of *The Case of the Love Commandos*, Tulsi is introduced as the daughter of Vishnu Mishra, who is described as “a Thakur, literally ‘lord’—a hereditary landowner with no qualms about exploiting the caste system that still doomed tens of millions of low-caste Indians to subjugation and poverty” (Hall 2). From the outset, the novel situates Tulsi within a rigid caste hierarchy that confers social privilege upon her family while simultaneously restraining her personal freedom. Another crucial detail disclosed early in the narrative is Tulsi’s romantic relationship with Ram, an “untouchable,” or Dalit—a caste so stigmatized within orthodox Hindu society that, until recent times, even minimal physical contact with its members was considered polluting (Hall 3). The vehement opposition of Tulsi’s father to this relationship showcases the extent to which caste and gender intersect in shaping women’s lives in contemporary India.

To grasp the significance of Tulsi’s predicament as an upper-caste woman, it is useful to invoke Uma Chakravarti’s concept of Brahmanical patriarchy, which she defines as “a unique structure of patriarchy... in which caste and gender are linked, each shaping the other, and

where women are crucial in maintaining the boundaries between castes”(Chakravarti 34–35). Within this system, patriarchal codes ensure the reproduction of the caste hierarchy through strictly regulated endogamous practices, organized into “closed endogamous circles, each distinct from and hierarchically ordered in relation to others” (34–35). As Chakravarti’s formulation makes clear, women are allocated an instrumental role in sustaining caste purity, rendering their bodies and choices sites of intense surveillance and control.

Caste endogamy thus emerges as a foundational pillar of Brahmanical patriarchy. In simple terms, it refers to the practice of restricting marriage strictly within one’s caste group (Ingole, 144). As Ingole observes, “a strict control of female sexuality by normalizing a discourse that attaches honour and pride of the group to the bodies of its women members, and legitimizing a culture of physical and moral securitization of female lives, are the most dominant ways through which caste endogamy is reproduced” (144). The enforcement of caste endogamy is therefore central to maintaining both inter-caste and intra-caste notions of purity and pollution. Within the hierarchical *varna* system, the control of women’s sexuality becomes indispensable, since preventing inter-caste unions is the only means by which caste boundaries can be preserved (Ingole 144). Tulsi’s forbidden relationship with Ram, consequently, constitutes not merely a romantic transgression but a direct threat to the ideological foundations of Brahmanical patriarchy itself.

Seen in this light, Tulsi’s relationship with Ram can be considered a direct threat to the ideological foundations of Brahmanical patriarchy itself. As an upper-caste woman, Tulsi is nevertheless a victim of patriarchal oppression: she is denied the right to marry the man she loves, her freedom is severely constrained, and her sexuality is tightly controlled. The description of Vishnu Mishra’s hostile reaction to her love affair with Ram illustrates the extent to which Tulsi’s individuality and agency are systematically erased. By preventing his daughter from seeing Ram again, blocking all communication between them, and confining her at home for several months, Vishnu Mishra exercises patriarchal authority in order to regulate female sexuality, prohibit inter-caste relations, and, by implication, enforce caste endogamy.

The assertion that “Vishnu Mishra would stop at nothing to prevent his daughter from seeing Ram again,” together with the violent threats he directs at the “Dalit dog,” exposes his readiness to employ intimidation and violence to preserve caste purity and uphold the hierarchical logic of the caste system (Hall 3). Such language not only dehumanizes Ram but also underscores the extreme measures through which caste boundaries are protected. Another strategy deployed to enforce caste endogamy is Vishnu Mishra’s reliance on an “upscale marriage broker” to secure a suitable match for his daughter (Hall 3). Tulsi’s description by Cupid’s Matrimonial Agency as “beautiful, homely, fair and proper height” reveals how upper-caste women are expected to conform to rigid gender norms that privilege domesticity, physical appearance, and submissiveness. Within this framework, Tulsi is reduced to a matrimonial commodity whose value lies in her ability to reproduce caste and patriarchal continuity rather than to exercise personal choice.

While *The Case of the Love Commandos* foregrounds the oppression experienced by upper-caste women such as Tulsi, the novel also exposes the vulnerable condition of Dalit women through the tragic figure of Kamlesh Sunder. The central crime investigated by Vish Puri, which is the murder of Kamlesh, Ram’s mother, serves as a narrative lens through which Hall

illuminates the physical, sexual, and structural violence inflicted upon Dalit women. Kamlesh's story reveals how caste, gender, and class intersect to render Dalit women particularly targets of exploitation, silencing, and ultimately, death. Kamlesh Sunder is repeatedly identified in the novel through her occupation as a midwife, a role that is highly defamed within the caste system. As Tulsi explains to Puri Ram "often talked about how she'd been treated badly... being a midwife, delivering babies. She was considered polluted" (Hall 235). More disturbingly, in the course of Puri's investigation, the revelation of Kamlesh's exposition to past sexual violation highlights the sexual dimension of Dalit women's oppression. Indeed, as attested by Bianca Cherechés, "Dalit women bear the burden of not only economic hardships and discrimination, but also the physical marking and weaponisation of their bodies, as they are constantly at risk of sexual violence and physical assault, and their bodies become symbolic battlegrounds for asserting caste dominance"(6). To state it differently, sexual violence against Dalit women serves as a means to assert superiority and reinforce hierarchy. As a Dalit woman, Kamlesh Sunder resigns to the fact that her body is a site upon which power is violently inscribed. Kamlesh's violation by a Brahmin physician, a figure of institutional authority, reveals how caste power operates not only in rural spaces but also within state institutions that are ostensibly neutral and protective. Her rape by a Brahmin doctor at a government hospital foregrounds the fact that Dalit women, as argued by Yashica Dutt, are viewed as a sexual property: caste Hindu men who feel entitled to their bodies (7). Kamlesh's inability to seek justice for this violation further underscores her marginalized position. As Sharmila Rege notes, Dalit women are frequently denied recognition as victims of sexual violence because they are presumed to possess no "honour" to be violated (120). This logic effectively silences Dalit women, rendering their suffering invisible and unaccountable. Kamlesh's later attempt to seek help from Baba Dhobi, a self-proclaimed Dalit leader, tragically culminates in her murder. As Puri reflects, "A Dalit who'd been oppressed all her life, treated worse than the stray dogs in the village... had gone to see the one person in the world she believed she could trust... Yet within a few hours Kamlesh Sunder, an innocent midwife, had been brutally murdered" (Hall188). Crime, in such a manner, far from being personal, for it is rooted in the social injustices committed against the Dalit and in the caste-ridden nature of the Indian society, which presents a deviation from the conventional idea of crime inscribed in classical cozies.

In addition to the character of Kamlesh Sunder, the plight of Dalit women is further underscored through the representation of other female characters. As a matter of fact, Facecream's meeting with three Dalit female characters demonstrates the multiple factors that shape the experience of Dalit women as subordinated subjects. The three women are desperate for the basic needs of life such as food. Their miserable conditions render their families eligible for Below Poverty Line Cards, which entitle them to thirty-five kilograms of rice or wheat each month (Hall 130). Nevertheless, owing to sophisticated administrative procedures, getting such cards has proved to be impossible. In this regard it is of pertinence to call attention to the fact that "[t]he foundations of Independent India's bureaucratic traditions are mired in its colonial legacy" (Aiyar 165). Indeed, Indian bureaucracy is founded upon the Indian Civil Service organizational framework, which was the major administrative structure used during the British colonial rule. Because Indians were regarded with profound distrust by the colonial administration, "the state was distanced from the people and organized to extract from them, rather than serve them" (Aiyar 165). Consequently, Independent India's bureaucracy has remained devoted to its colonial fondness of paper, and procedures. Files and written procedures and records have further entrenched themselves as the apparatuses through which

the bureaucratic hierarchy exerts its control over its subordinates (Aiyar 165). By highlighting the bureaucratic hurdles faced by the three female characters, Hall's novel casts light on the great role that bureaucracy plays in deepening the struggle of the Dalit women in postcolonial India. Furthermore, the reference to the "big green and yellow bruise" on the arm of one of the Dalit female characters serves to point to another dimension of their marginalization. The Institute for Cellular and Molecular Biology (ICMB), which is based on Agra and which takes blood samples from Dalits in the village of Govind, evokes the idea of biocolonialism. Briefly, biocolonial practices are manifested in Western and international endeavours to acquire and patent plants and animals and human genes as lucrative sources of medical, pharmaceutical and nutraceutical products or as 'raw materials' for the multi-billion dollar businesses of the twenty first century biotechnology revolution (Ashcroft et al. 29). What is of pertinence to note is that Hall associates these practices with Dalit communities whose social and economic marginalization hinders their ability to question or resist such interventions. From an intersectional perspective, this episode demonstrates that the oppression experienced by Dalit women cannot be reduced to caste or gender alone. Rather, their bodies become sites where multiple structures of power converge, including patriarchy, caste hierarchy, poverty, bureaucracy, and global systems of scientific exploitation. In this way, it can be said that the novel broadens its critique beyond local forms of discrimination to expose the complex networks of domination that remain to exert a toll on the lives of many women in postcolonial India.

In the light of what has been said so far, thus, it can be said that scrutinizing the representation of major female characters in Hall's *The Case of the Love Commandos* from a feminist postcolonial point of view discloses that Hall departs from the socially restricted milieu traditionally associated with Golden Age detective fiction to emphasize how women's experiences are shaped by their differing positions within India's social hierarchy. Rather than limiting crime to personal motives within an insulated middle-class community, he foregrounds caste oppression, gender violence, bureaucratic exclusion, and social inequality. Consequently, the mystery becomes a vehicle for social critique rather than merely intellectual entertainment. What is worth noting is that Hall's strategic use of the generic conventions of the cozy novel not only aims to highlight the suffering of different Indian women but also to underline their resilience and resistance, which will be the focal point in what follows.

4.2. Reworking the Female Agency Tradition of the Golden Age Detective Novel

In his representation of major female characters, Hall not only expands the social milieu of the classical cozy novel in order to illuminate their diverse experiences with oppressive patriarchal structures, but he also develops the theme of female agency conveyed by many golden age detective novels. Hall's tendency to underscore the theme of female agency in his novel can be detected in his female character Mummy-Ji. From the opening scenes of the novel, Mummy-Ji is depicted as Puri's mother, a grand-mother, and at the same time as a woman who possesses "an uncanny knack of getting to the bottom of things (Hall 31)," echoing her intuitive and analytical aptitude for detective work. The image of Mummy-Ji as a woman detective calls into mind Agatha Christie's fictional detective, Miss Jane Marple. "Distinguished by her village geography (St Mary Mead) and pastimes – knitting, gardening, and bird-watching – Miss Marple has moral force, intelligence, an inquisitive nature, excellent knowledge of human behavior, and pays attention to details" (Gavin 263). Hence, Christie's Miss Marple and Hall's Mummy-Ji are both old and female investigators who deploy feminine methods of detection

such as gossip. What is of significance to note is that Hall's reliance on the familiar figure of Miss Marple serves to empower his Indian female detective by illustrating how she manages to resist patriarchal thinking. Indeed, despite the fact that her investigative competence is highlighted, Mummy-Ji's inclination toward detection is relentlessly rejected by her son. Puri believes that she should "stick to what she is best at: making *gulab jamuns* and all" (Hall 32), thus reproducing a gendered division of labor that consigns women to the private sphere and confines them to domestic duties. His assertion that he is "the only detective in the family" and that "mummies are not detectives" (Hall 33) aligns with both prevailing social norms and the masculinist conventions of classical detective fiction. Moreover, Mummy-Ji's abilities are similarly undermined by institutional authority figures such as Inspector Malhotra, who initially dismisses her insights, which serves to demonstrate the great extent to which gender bias can operate within official structures of power. However, a close reading of Hall's novel illustrates that Mummy-Ji is represented as an Indian woman who knows how to negotiate and resist the different constraints imposed upon her. Her success to identify the culprits behind both the theft of Puri's wallet and the planned robbery at the Vaishno Devi temple accentuates her resilience and her intellectual potential. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, it can be said that Hall adopts the established literary figure of Miss Marple in order to construct the fictional character of Mummy-Ji, a character who shatters both patriarchal expectations and colonial stereotypes of Indian women as passive and subservient. In this way, it can be concluded that Mummy-Ji is constructed as an empowered maternal figure that disrupts different intersecting norms: her agency subtly yet fruitfully challenges the gendered and colonial hierarchies underpinning the detective genre.

Another main female character that shows resistance to the oppressive force of patriarchy in the novel under study is the character of Facecream. Indeed, by the end of the first chapter, the reader comes to learn that Facecream, who usually features in the Vish Puri series as a Nepali female undercover operative, plays an instrumental role: she is deeply engaged in the Love Commandos organization by endeavoring to defy caste restrictions and unite Tulsi and Ram. "Love Commandos" is the name of a non-governmental organization that was founded in 2010 in Delhi. It "created a new political platform and course of action for addressing an old "problem": Indians attempting to cross lines of caste or community to marry someone of their choosing" (Sadana 39). Its major aims are putting an end to honour killings and offering "a safe haven for couples who are in imminent danger" (Sadana 39). By operating under the name Laxmi in the Love Commandos organization, Facecream emerges as a rebellious woman who directly opposes the most coercive aspects of Brahmanical patriarchy which is the tight control of women's freedom and sexuality.

Facecream's position as a central figure of resistance is further strengthened through her detective work. What is striking is that she assumes the false identity of "the new teacher" in the Govind village not only to collect clues to help resolve the case of the murder of the Dalit woman kamlesh Sunder, but more importantly, to enact social change. Indeed, she seizes the opportunity to help the poor pupils, to provide basic requirements, and more importantly to defy and challenge caste divisions among students (Hall 104). By asking the children to stand up and sing the national anthem, for example, Facecream actually espouses subtle pedagogical tactics to foster unity and promote equality. In such a manner, thus, it can be inferred that Facecream is represented as an Indian female character who manages to negotiate and resist the complex intersections of caste, class, and gender within a deeply stratified society. Besides, it

can be concluded that Facecream, by combining investigation and social intervention, departs from the traditional figure of the cozy detective whose mission is essentially the restoration of social order.

In addition to the characters of Mummy-Ji and Facecream, the characters of Tulsi and the three Dalit women equally help to convey the theme of female agency. Despite the fact that she has suffered from the patriarchal authority of her father, Tulsi shows a great resilience against the rigid norms of Brahmanical patriarchy. Tulsi is far from being the Brahmin passive woman who shows total submission to familial authority and whose role is just perpetuating caste purity. Indeed, by insisting on her right to choose her partner, Tulsi challenges the patriarchal attempts to regulate her sexuality and future. Throughout the novel, despite the tension and the dangers that she has faced, she persists, and in the end she succeeds to defeat caste barriers by managing to marry Ram. It can be said, thus, the wedding scene is actually a celebration of the two lovers' union, and more crucially a celebration of their success to overcome age-old caste restrictions. The theme of resistance is further extended in the epilogue of the novel which underscores the great resilience shown by the three Dalit women. Despite their relegation to the fringes of society, the three women refuse to be passive and helpless. Their journey to Lucknow to seek help from Kukreja Madam is meant to expose the role played by official authorities in keeping the Dalit community in the margin of society and to underscore their determination to speak for their rights (Hall 286). By accepting Kukreja Madam's assertion that change cannot be overnight, and by showing their readiness to "stand for what was rightfully theirs" (Hall 287), the three Dalit women as powerful figures of resistance.

5. Conclusion

As a conclusion, it can be said that a postcolonial feminist reading of Tarquin Hall's *The Case of the Love Commandos* reveals that it employs the formulaic framework of the cozy classical novel in a strategic manner in order to present a nuanced portrayal of Indian women, reflecting both the constraints of patriarchy and the diverse forms of female agency. Through characters such as Tulsi, Kamlesh Sunder, Facecream, and the three Dalit women, the novel discloses how gender, caste, and class *intersect* to shape women's experiences, laying bare forms of oppression that cannot be understood through a single lens or Western feminist frameworks. By foregrounding these intersections, the present article challenges essentialist and derogatory representations of Indian women. Indeed, a postcolonial feminist reading demonstrates that Hall's detective novel stretches the generic boundaries of the classical cozy novel in order to capture the specificity of Indian women's predicament within particular historical and cultural contexts. It equally illustrates how popular detective fiction can critically engage with both social hierarchies and postcolonial exploitative structures. While giving insight into the struggle of both Upper-caste and Dalit women, the novel empowers them by showing their sense of resilience and their agency. In such a manner, Hall's *The Case of the Love Commandos* proves to be a productive site for postcolonial feminist critique, for it demonstrates how genre fiction can engage critically with the gendered, caste-based, and postcolonial realities that still have a lingering impact on Indian women's lives.

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