
THE DEHUMANIZED MURDERER: THE STUDY OF CASES OF MULTIPLE HOMICIDES IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE VICTORIAN WORLD OF CRIME

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Abstract: The Victorians became increasingly aware of how sharply the count of crimes was rising at the end of the eighteenth century and increased in leaps and bounds through the nineteenth century. Reports saw the number of cases rising from 5000 a year in the year 1800 to about 20000 in 1840. The times turned more and more unsafe and violent with increasing poverty and population. The growth of the Industrial Revolution had rendered a large section of the society poor and impoverished. The various petty crimes like theft and pickpockets had increased greatly due to the poverty and unemployment in the undernourished sections of the society but the main point of concern was the increase in the rate of murders. Turning the pages of the not so often visited history bring forth some of the most horrific and spine chilling cases of murders lurking in the Victorian setting. More than visiting the times, an encounter with them takes a shivering glimpse into the dehumanised mind of the human being caught in the web of the deprivations and darkness of the shadows standing against the lights of city life.

Keywords: Serial killing, types of murders, Victorian world of crime, Victorian killers.

Introduction: Crime is as old as the human world. It has proved itself to be an intrinsic part of the human world while law and order has been established in various forms throughout to control the damage of crime, to punish and prevent crime. The criminal instinct is probably a dormant part of the human psychology which turns active in the criminal. Where and when who might turn a criminal or what might turn a person criminal is impossible to gauge or predict. Murder, the most appalling of all human crimes, leads to a diverse arena of unanswerable questions of unfathomable human behaviour. Murder for a reason, on compulsion or for no reason at all, all kinds of the dreadful act that takes place in full consciousness of the murderer, marks the murderer as the criminal who cannot be forgiven and often times the criminal who cannot be forgotten. The murderer has made bloody history come alive time and again. Though charted in a frame of time to which each murderer belongs, the murderer but remains the most shocking form of a human being who can be framed within no boundaries of time, age, sex or position. Is being beastly and violent a natural ability of human beings or is it something that is unnaturally incorporated into the human being due to circumstantial pressure remains a debatable issue. No matter belonging to which period of time, the deeds of the visible or the invisible murderer remain unforgotten and do not fail to send a chill down the spine.

The case of the conjectured murderer called Jack the Ripper, the Whitechapel murders of 1888 in Victorian England can bring into mind a lot of things- It marks one of the most infamous cases The Scotland Yard had failed to solve and reminds one of the chilling

cases of murder and of serial killing that terrorized the streets of London and many other parts of Europe during this time. The 19th Century, the Victorian times saw a scary increase in the rate of and kinds of crime as they saw the change and progress of the system of investigation. The most alarming of these was the number of murders that took place during this time.

The Victorians became increasingly aware of how sharply the count of crimes was rising at the end of the eighteenth century. They increased in leaps and bounds through the Nineteenth century. Reports saw the number of cases rising from 5000 a year in the year 1800 to about 20000 in 1840. The times turned more and more unsafe and violent with increasing poverty and population. The growth of the Industrial Revolution had rendered a large section of the society poor and impoverished. A need for an orderly enforcement of law and order was required in the dire situations. The London Police force was first formed in 1829 and The Scotland Yard as the headquarters had been established. The first National Police Force was set up in the year 1856. The County Borough Police Act made it mandatory for the whole country to set up police forces. Government control brought about a more organized system. The main need for this was for the inspection plans carried out in factories and workhouses. The other major cause and effect of this was the shift that took place from 'prevention of crime to the detection of crime.'

The Modern police Force was only half as efficient of what it was required to be. It was difficult for the police to act efficiently. In many instances they failed. There were only about 12,000 policemen in England and Wales.

The murder crimes of the period were a major threat to the maintenance of law and order by the police force. In 1877, the Criminal Investigations Department was formed. It constituted 200 detectives. They formed the highly regarded group of detectives in plain clothes. In less than a decade a few more hundred were appointed.

Newer forms of murder and the macabre serial killings resulted in a need for more detailed investigation and surveillance. Once the convict was caught, the trial and punishment was something that was carried out in a very orderly manner. There were various forms of punishment. However execution of the convicts that was very commonly practised in the 18th century had to be reduced in the 19th century because of the disturbance it was causing among the public.

The various petty crimes like theft and pickpockets had increased greatly due to the poverty and unemployment in the undernourished sections of the society but the main point of concern was the increase in the rate of murders. Death sentence was used less and less after Queen Victoria came to the throne because the punishment of hanging for petty crimes made law inhuman. In 1823, the number of felonies for which capital punishment could be given was greatly reduced by Sir Robert Peel and by 1830 John Russell abolished many offences for which criminals could be executed. Many cases of serious crime did not punish the criminals with severity of death but were assigned punishments like transportation to other countries, mostly to the colonies or sending offenders into the army for taking part in the armed forces that was always in need of manpower. The capital punishment by the 1850s was mainly carried out for convicts all of whom were murderers. The Public execution of murderers was a gruesome aspect of the procedure of trial. The execution would take place in the open outside the prison where thousands of people would gather to watch the hanging. The public hanging was done to spread fear among the crowd and remind them of the consequences of serious crime.

The convict would be taken up to the "Drop room" where he would be hanged in the presence of the Governor, the Sheriff, the Chaplain and the Executioner. The body after being hanged would be allowed to hang there for an hour before being brought down. This was for all to see. The role of the jury was one of major importance in the procedure of prosecution in the 19th century. Stephen Burke in 1825 was the last public hanging that took place. He was charged with the murder of his wife.

Even with a reduction in the number of death sentences that could be meted out, in a period of 100 years between 1800 and 1900, out of 3524 people to be

hanged in Scotland and England only, 1353 people were sentenced to death for murder. The major retribution for murder was death sentence but often such criminals would also be transported to colonies or kept in prison under observation, complete isolation and severe physical labour as punishment. Some of the most appalling and dreadful tales of murder surround this period of time.

Turning the pages of the not so often visited history bring forth some of the most horrific and spine chilling cases of murders lurking in the Victorian setting. More than visiting the times, an encounter with them is taking a glimpse into the dehumanised mind of the human being who becomes a murderer... Like all other insights into the unknown realm of the psychology of minds-we sit back to think- what and how the mind of the person committing the murder must have been working. Whether some cases stand out to be more grotesque than the others is also something we spare a moment to consider, are there levels of being gross... or isn't every murderer just the murderer.

"Thus murder becomes a zero sum game; it either expresses innate human depravity, as the Puritans would have it, or it challenges the belief of "Enlightenment liberalism" in human nature's intrinsic goodness (hence the need for the murderer as a separate category of humanity). The possibility of a rational explanation for grotesque and barbaric homicides is rarely entertained."¹

There were various kinds of murders that could be identified during the Victorian period of time. The time witnessed some of the most gruesome works of the serial killers that came as a shockingly macabre wave of unprecedented events; the time saw the series of butchering of babies, the killing of women, the murders by doctors and the murders for issues of power, loyalty and relationships.

Though time has advanced to the modern age with such murders only becoming more common, more fearful and more ghastly every day, the Victorian backdrop contained a plethora of such activities worldwide, growingly and ironically questioning the idea of enlightenment of the times that was thought to have brought about a reduction in crime. It was rather just on the contrary. Whereas some acts could be related to be the effect of societal norms and ills of the socio-political structures affecting lives of individuals; many cases only remain frightful accounts of unreasonable, illogical killing and slaughter that makes one want to take a peek into the scary convoluted brains of those murderers whose pleasures of killing arouse disgust and fear.

Several methods of killing during the Victorian era can be identified. Violence on the body of the murder victim had quite a few manners in the Victorian trail

of murders. To first ones one does come up with are the cases of serial killing that spread trauma and shock throughout the streets of England. The most famous name to be associated with it is that of the unsolved case of 'Jack the Ripper.' Serial killing or multiple homicides was a new criminal activity of the Victorian world. In the essay '*Mass Murder: America's growing Menace*', James Alan Fox and Jack Kevin describe homicide as- "slaying of four or more victims, simultaneously or sequentially, by one or a few individuals attempting to satisfy personal desires, such as power, profit, revenge, sex, loyalty, or control. The forms that this ex-treme violence takes are wide-ranging (see Keeney and Heide 1995): from the sadist who stalks prostitutes in a red-light district to the hospital orderly who suffocates elderly patients with a pillow; from the schoolyard sniper to the disgruntled employee who resolves his work-place grievances with an AK-47; from the cult that abducts and kills strangers for the purpose of human sacrifice to the band of armed robbers who shoot and kill a roomful of witnesses to their crimes."

It speaks in a broad context of any large scale mass murder of human beings. The need to murder and the unabashed shameless slaughtering of human beings has become a common practice with the modern world and though post world wars no violence seems newly shocking anymore, for the Victorian world such a mass killing was a shocking paradigm of human insensitivity. Even the death sentence of felonies for petty crimes had roused rage and discontent among the Victorian crowd. The unrest had caused the measures to be taken. For such a world, the presence of an unknown killer out in the dark, foggy shadowy streets was a deadly truth that was more than difficult to come to terms with.

While speaking of any serial killer of the time, it most certainly reminds one of the horrors of the Whitechapel murders, the 'Jack the Ripper' murders of the 1880s. The series of brutal murders of women in Whitechapel had terrorized London. Only after the murders were found to be linked did the idea of one common killer come in. He is often known as the father of modern serial killing. Many letters were received by the Scotland Yard claiming to have committed the murders. Whether that was a challenge to the order of the police investigation is not known, but unfortunately investigation could not unravel the dark mystery.

Most of the victims of the Whitechapel murders happened to be prostitutes. The connection is not clearly known but it certainly generated a fear for the labelled women who had been forced to take up prostitution that was a growing profession for women in those times. Prostitution was considered the profession of the 'fallen woman' of the times. Poverty

and a boom in population was the major problem that created the dire situation. By the UK census of 1851, the number of women was found to outdo the number of men. Women in the Victorian times had no social and monetary security. The women could only gain security of position by being governesses or by marrying. Women needed to be modest, loyal and pure to be good wives and mothers and certainly not questioning the position of the man of the house. Victorian patriarchy held the woman in the idealistic chains of what Coventry Patmore had termed as the "angel in the house" for which prostitution of women was the greatest aberration of idealism. By the Contagious Disease Act of 1864 the prostitutes were considered to be the carriers of sexually transmitted diseases who could be caught by the police and if found infected would be kept confined. By the Divorce legislation of 1857 a man could divorce his wife if she was found to be disloyal. Such conditions often left the woman with no choice. Acts the man was responsible were never blamed on him but the woman had to suffer the consequences. Most of the crimes of the Victorian age can be seen to have their roots in the hypocrisy and ideals of the times. Victorian patriarchy and the Victorian Morality threatened the lives of the women the most among all. Even in the chart of crime and criminal activity, the woman thus occupies a strange position. She is seen to be the centre in many cases in being the victim, or the murderer but always the one who loses it all.

Jack the Ripper was the unidentified killer who has till date not been found. There have been many conjectures and many other killers have claimed with pride the same title, but the real Jack was never found and he happens to have done away even with the charges of the five brutal murders, with probability of many more. The killer remained a mystery for the police who were unable to solve the case. The police were sent various letters and parcels by the killer but they were unable to trace him. Jack the Ripper was what we today understand as a serial killer, one who kills for pleasure and takes pride in his work as an artist in his art. Though with little facts available, the entire case remains only speculation, an interesting assumption that Jack the Ripper might have been a female is also made though unlikely to be so. Some say the Forensic study of the materials sent by the killer happened to identify the saliva at the back of a stamp as that of a female's. Being unidentified, Jack the Ripper came to be associated with all serial brutal killing cases of the times, even if remotely so.

In this case the police had failed but other than Jack the Ripper, most of the later killers had been caught and hanged.

The Westport murders of 1827-1828 were another

strange case of serial killing by William Burke and William Hare. The two had together committed more than sixteen murders. The most commonly used manner of killing used by them was strangling. They killed the people and sold the corpses to a private anatomy lecturer. The doctor who regularly bought the dead bodies was Robert Knox who was never pulled into the seat of trial for the crime. Burke and Hare had been caught but the police had no proper evidence to declare them convicts. The evidence was taken from Hare and his wife and it sent Burke to the gallows.

The Victorian crime scenes saw the increasing involvement of science and medicine in both criminal activity and investigation. The Forensic methods began to be used in investigation in the 19th century. Scotland Yard was the first to use a fingerprint classification system designed by Sir Edward Richard Henry. Forensic became greatly applicable in the murder cases of the 19th century. Many other cases often involved doctors who were well trained practitioners of Medicine. With them and some major other cases of murder, the method of poisoning the victim is seen. The doctors were found to be murderers who mainly used poisoning as the tool for murder. The names that remain terrors in this field include that of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream and Dr. William Palmer.

The most terrific account of a series of murders after Jack the Ripper is probably the case of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream. He is also known as 'The Lambeth Poisoner'. Neill carried out a total of nine murders in America and England out of which eight were of women. He was a doctor who offered abortion to prostitutes at a cheap rate. Many such women became his murder victims. His ways of killing were majorly poisoning, having studied medicine in Canada, Scotland and England. Before setting up his clinic, Neill was charged with the murder of his mistress Kate Gardener who was heavily pregnant when she died due to chloroform poisoning. He got away that time. It is also suspected that his wife Flora Brooks who died of consumption was also actually murdered by him. Most of the other victims he killed including the prostitutes he visited were killed with strychnine. The London police finally caught him with evidence of murder, having kept him under constant watch and keeping contact with the Canada police. He was tried and hanged at Newgate Prison by James Billington. He was one of the many criminals who had claimed to be Jack the Ripper. Cream was brought to trial and was "acquitted by the all-male jury that believed Cream was being persecuted by the midwife who testified against him."² Mc Laren says how "society's misogynistic attitudes, which condemned women who sought abortions, ultimately

allowed Cream to kill again."

A year later, he was convicted of murder after a young wife poisoned her elderly husband with medication he prescribed. He spent ten years in prison.

"Cream was "a sick product of his society" whose propensities were inflamed by "a generalized misogyny or mistrust of women at a time when women were making a well-publicized bid for greater autonomy"(p. 140). But he also makes it clear that the women Cream preyed upon were not helpless victims. They were not without friends and networks of their own, and despite the censure they faced, this sisterhood led them to step from the shadows to supply the information that led to Cream's conviction."³

Dr. Palmer, 'The Rugeley poisoner.' was hanged by the chief executioner George Smith at Old Bailey. He had committed around ten murders. He had killed his mother-in-law, his wife and his children and some of his creditors, as it seems all because of repaying his debts. He would get amounts of money from the insurances. His family members died mysteriously and he was caught while trying to poison his friend Mr. Cook. He had been kept at Stafford jail. He hadn't readily confessed his crime but the jury had eventually made him do so.

Among the poisoners, the other most infamous name is that of George Chapman who killed Mary Spink, Elizabeth Taylor, and Maude Marsh all of whom had been his wife or ones he had affairs with among numerous other ones. Not until his third murder were his first two murders discovered. Chapman who was originally Severin Klosowski had taken up Chapman as his name after meeting a woman named Annie Chapman. All his lovers had mysteriously died complaining of nausea and stomach pain. After the death of Maude, all the three bodies were examined following the suspicion that led to the bodies being exhumed. The women were found to have died of antimony poisoning. Chapman interestingly had also taken medical lessons in Poland in his early years. Chapman is also known as 'the Borough Poisoner.' Chapman's prosecution was carried out by Sir Archibald Bodkin and Sir Edward Carson at The Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court in England and Wales.

The poison killings became a widespread and commonly used means of murdering, mostly in personal reasons for murder. But among the killing of women, the other gross incident remains that of the 'Brides in the bath' murders. It was one of the major cases of significant forensic investigation. George Joseph Smith and the mysterious death of his brides in their baths unveiled another horrific tale of murder. This case was investigated by the Divisional

Detective Inspector Neil and not by the Chief Inspector from the Commissioner's office. With convolutions and intricacies in crime, the need for the extraordinary Detective mind was becoming more and more important. Smith was charged with the murders of Bessie Williams, Alice Smith, and Margaret Lloyd. He was sentenced to death. The death of all the three women in their baths without post-mortem had seemed to be like accidental deaths due to drowning and heart failure. The similarity in the manner of their deaths and the fact that each had left Smith a good amount of insurance was what started the investigation.

For each of the Serial killers, the methods taken up for the murders seem to be a consistent and similar one. It is one of the major things that help the Forensic and Investigation department to follow the trail and pick up evidence against the murderer. The situations of the murders of the women mentioned can be connected to the staunch patriarchal societies of the worlds. The places like America, England and India happened to be and still are the deep seated centres of crime against women. The serial killings of the Victorian times majorly saw women as the victims. They being victims of the laws, times, codes and familial responsibilities also became the major victims of the hunger for power, pleasure and money which became the fascination of the murderer and in turn the cause of murder.

While discussing *'Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing'* by Jill Radford; Diana Russell

Beth Prinz writes, "Serial killers almost always murder women, and sexual mutilation and rape are frequently involved. It is argued here that the media "normalize" our society by ignoring the gender of the victims and by labeling the killer as a monster or lunatic, rather than a man. Thus, serial killers' attacks on women are represented as having nothing to do with our society; rather, they are aberrations."

The Victorian society that preached male supremacy and power did victimize the woman in every way but along with 'femicide' of the times, the woman also left her mark alongside the male murderer in the history of crime. Man and woman have always emerged equal though it has been unacknowledged by society. Even in crime and activities of the dark spaces of the human world and mind, the man and the woman have shared the space. A murderer but probably transcends the gender, the social or any naturally or socially framed human traits. The instinct of murder transcends the power play of gender or the power structure of society though often the instigation of murder arises from these things; the act while it is being performed forgets it all. A murderer becomes an entity in play even with the force and order that is the greater protector of law

and order, with whom he/she is involved in a game of sport. There are various accidental murders as there are intentional ones. There are many others that are done in unavoidable circumstances. But a murder remains a murder.

The role of gendered analysis came into the scene when the trial of murders took place. The woman criminal was supposed to have been a transgressor in more than one ways. Though the number of male convicts have been a lot more than the female ones, the female murderers deserved a more difficult and sterner punishment, so was thought just because of the sex of the murderer.

"Trials of men who murdered women are examined in detail, showing how defenses of "provocation" and "diminished responsibility" are used to shift blame to the victim. These same defenses are rarely successful in cases where women murder men because of the values that our culture promotes about sexual ownership and the definitions of reasonable "proper" behavior for women and for men." ⁴

By the Abortion Laws of the Nineteenth century, abortion rights were not allowed to women legally. It said that this was only to protect women from illegal and unhealthy abortions carried on in clinics illegally. Though laws and the masters always claimed that they were well wishers of women, it did nothing other than making living difficult for women at mercy of the men for money, house and care for their children. The compulsion of being mothers and the accidental motherhoods along with the baby boom claimed life of many a Victorian woman. It also gave rise to newer forms of evil and unforgivable crimes. The social system of the times had women suffering the burden of being a woman. It was mostly apparent in cases where servants got pregnant and the masters of the house needed the matters to be silenced as fast as possible. The "lying-in" were places that came up during this time that offered the pregnant women a place for giving birth and resting to recover as well as leaving behind the babies in care of the owners for a certain amount charged.

The root of all crime lies in the social evils of the human world. These places used to hide the evils that Victorian morality was so scared of revealing but while being a place of clandestine activity, these places became the seat of a different horror. The burden of the innocent children was thrust upon the Victorian world every way, so it seemed. Poverty and lust for power and money leaves an individual in no connection with the finer humane inner spheres. The crimes of the time proved it.

The woman is the meek mild and the weakling and all the epitome of goodness is she meant to be is what the Victorian world preached and forced their women to become. Any other character in a woman placed

her in a zone of social exclusivity. The questioning women were ones who were lunatics and meant to belong to places like the 'Magdalene Asylums.'⁵

The woman has never remained bound to the restricted roles assigned to her. Be it in the positive or the negative sense. Lady Macbeth and her ability of dire cruelty and Clytemnestra's murdering her husband and Medea's revenge for disloyalty have in the pages of literature since a long time talked about the unacknowledged veins of women.

The Victorian world in pushing women beyond the optimum limit of tolerance did witness some of the most shocking behaviours that could ever be associated with their underestimated idea of the woman. The woman nourishes and protects and is always meant to be duty bound was the idea that they carried. Nature has but equally divided and balanced her designs between man and woman. While the woman can be the sole nourisher of life, she can also become the predator who takes lives. The Divorce laws of the time were no less unfair to the woman. She would lose custody of all her children once the divorce took place. The divorce could be asked for by the husband for adultery on part of the wife but divorce would not be granted to the wife if not she could prove adultery along with cruelty, bigamy or incest on part of the husband. Many women like Florence Maybrick had been punished for no proved reason. She was convicted of having murdered her elderly husband. He had talked of divorcing her because of her affair with Brierley and other men.

She is told to have poisoned her husband with arsenic but whether the death was because of that was not something that was proved. She had probably wanted to kill him for her dear children above everything whose custody she would lose because of divorce. Florence was not given death sentence but was sent to prison for fourteen years. After she came back she wrote about her life in prison in *'My Fifteen Lost Years.'* She was forced to narrate her story. She writes, "when I set out to tell my pitiful little story, I was told to look at myself objectively; then to pry into myself subjectively; then to regard both in their relation to the outside world — to de-scribe how this, that, or the other affected me ; in short, as one of them, more deep in science than others, expressed it, " We want as much as possible of the psychology of your prison life." I surreptitiously looked up that awe-in-spiring word in a dictionary, and found that it refers to the soul, and that it was my soul they wanted me to lay bare. I vehemently protested that that belonged to my God, and I had no right to expose it for daws to peck at. But the publishers, with the aid of my friends, persuaded me that the public would give me their tenderest regard, and that possibly the humanities might be furthered a bit if the story of a

woman — whatever might be her failings in other directions — wholly guiltless of the terrible charge of wilful murder, and for which in her innocence she was made to suffer so cruelly, be given in fullest heart detail to a sympathetic world. So I have done what I trust is best for all — spared myself as little as possible, lest the picture fail from suppression — and my dearest heart-hope is that somewhat of good may come of it, especially in behalf of those whom a dire fate shall compel to follow in my steps, with bruised spirits and bleeding feet."

The idea of the woman and grotesque things being at odds with one another is certainly challenged by the possibility and range of evil witnessed by the times in seeing what a woman too is capable of. The woman did not always remain the prey and the victim.

The accounts of the murders by women again prove that good and evil is human and stand beyond the rule of gender. The unimaginable horror tales of the murders of the infants carried out by various women all across the world during these times confound thoughts.

Amelia Dyer, Amelia Sach and Annie Waters in Britain, Williamina Minnie Dean of New Zealand, Enriqueta Martii Ripolles of Spain to name a few were the women associated with some horrific tales of infant killing.

Amelia Dyer is the most notorious name related with these murders. She was caught with the charges of killing baby Marmon but later on many more bodies were discovered which showed how brutally she had murdered innocent babies like Helena and the few months old baby boy. It is speculated that she had committed hundreds of murders. Her name is enlisted in the chart of one of the most malevolent brutal murderers of Britain. Amelia Dyer was hanged by James Billington at Newgate Prison. The two women Amelia Sach and Annie Waters were the first women to be hanged at Holloway by Henry Pierrepoint. They were the ones who had created a "lying-in" where they would keep babies and also take them in for adoption with charges. These babies left with them after birth were killed with chlorodyne that contained morphine. It is assumed that innumerable such babies were killed by the two women. They were known as the 'Finchley baby farmers.' Williamina Minnie Dean was the only woman in New Zealand to receive a death penalty after being found guilty of infanticide. Enriqueta's horror tale entails a ghastly tale of witch practices and pedophilia.

Mary Ann Cotton, Catherine Wilson and Jane Toppan are other names that are associated with ruthlessness of the woman.

Jane Toppan is remembered for some of the most gruesome murders in history. She claimed that she

loved killing people. She was an American Serial killer who killed more than 30 people. She was a nurse who killed her patients and she said how watching them die gave her pleasure and holding them while they died made her feel good. She experimented with drugs on people. She used morphine and strychnine to poison them. Her case is often thought too be one of psychological illness.

The woman criminal in the Victorian society was but treated differently than the male. The woman was to have more serious punishment than a male criminal just for being female. The Victorian laws in every way pushed the woman to the threshold of patience and tolerance if she felt it.

“Studying the history of crime and criminal justice in a society can tell us much about that society. The Victorians' perception of criminal offenders was linked closely with their perception of the social order in respect of both class and gender. Most offenders brought before the courts came from the working class. It did not matter that their offences were generally petty compared with the frauds committed by middle-class businessmen, it was the mass of petty offenders who provided the data for the image of 'the criminal'. Most offenders brought before the courts were male. This suited Victorian perceptions of the separate spheres, and ensured that women brought before the courts, especially for violent offences, tended to be treated more harshly than men. Not only had they transgressed the law, they had also transgressed the perceptions of womanhood. Recidivism was more serious among women probably because it was more difficult for a woman to live down the shame of a criminal conviction.”⁶

The Criminal is but a criminal and the ways of functioning while committing crime has been seen to be hardly different for man and woman. The criminal is a human aberration or truly must be treated as a separate section of humanity remains debatable

again. The dehumanization of the criminal is brought about by various means and for various reasons. Many of the murders committed by the women have been seen to have a troubled childhood whereas many have not had any such history. Most of the murders committed by the men seem to have been for personal lust for money and power or sex. The same applies to many women like Mary Pearcey who had killed her lover's wife and infant ruthlessly out of jealousy and Jane Toppan who killed for nothing but pleasure. Many of the cases like that of Jane Toppan may have been found to be cases of mental disturbance that led to such ruthless behaviour. However, in the history of how criminals were treated in the 18th and 19th century, the prominence of class was a signifier of crime in the first few phases. The people from the lower classes, from the impoverished sections of society were usually the ones who were believed to be capable of committing all sorts of crime. After the chilling murder cases and ruthless serial killings and rapes started, the criminal in the eyes of law became a psychological aberration for the kinds of criminal acts could not be in those times assigned to the normal human being.

Not until much later has it become apparent that criminals are ones among human beings. They are not separate entities. The possibility of a murderer existing in any human being is something that is difficult to accept. But a murderer is a murderer, unconstrained by any limitations of class, gender or profession. There is no identifier of signifier of a murderer. Murder just remains a beastly and unfathomable cruelty and ruthlessness inherently present in the mind of the murderer. The thoughts of murder unavoidably bring into mind the character of Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* who probably has been able to portray the instinct of murder the best which is guided by nothing but overvaulting passion. The unnatural deed does bring in the unnatural consequences too.

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