

**Vol 1**

**Memoirs of a Taboo: A Novel**

**Vol 2**

**Women in pre- and post-Victorian India:**

**The use of historical research in the writing of fiction**

by

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## **Abstract**

This practice-based creative writing doctorate supports the creation of a novel that is in part, historical fiction, based on research focusing on the discrepancies in the perceived status of women between the pre-Victorian and the postmillennial periods in India. The accompanying component of the doctorate, the analytical thesis, traces the course of this research in connection to the novel's structural development, its narrative complexity and its characters.

The novel traces the journey of two women protagonists – each placed in the 18th- and the 21st-centuries, respectively – as they reconcile to the realities of their individual circumstances.

The introduction to the critical thesis gives a brief synopsis of the novel. It also explains the rationale behind the approaches used in the novel, and in adopting a post-postcolonial and progressive voice throughout the fictional work.

The first chapter in the critical thesis demonstrates how findings from the primary and secondary research have been applied to inform the writing of the novel. It also explains the influence of the Indian oral narrative tradition and its related approaches on the creative process with regards to the novel.

The second chapter briefly surveys traditional assumptions about the liberal attitudes to female sexuality in ancient and pre-Victorian India through literary examples. It identifies possible reasons for the changing status of women in contemporary Indian society, specifically in Kerala, which forms part of the settings in the novel.

The third chapter in the thesis examines Ambilli's process of self-acceptance or making peace with her past trauma. It draws on the Indian notion of karma, the folktales and storytelling tradition of

south India, which believes in the philosophy that stories are one of the means by which women can reconcile to reality.

The fourth chapter elaborates upon the narrative devices used in the novel; its metafictional element and the inspiration for it.

The thesis concludes by analysing the process of the writing practice and places it within the context of the aims of the research subject: the changing status of women in India over the past three centuries with regards to their sexuality. Finally, the study contributes to contemporary literature by bringing to light some fascinating aspects of the public role of women in ancient and pre-Victorian India as well as some lesser-known historical incidents, and re-interpreting these in the novel in an engaging and informative narrative.

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