THE CONCEPT OF WOMANHOOD: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOME FEMALE & MALE VICTORIAN NOVELISTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE BRONTËS, GEORGE ELIOT, THACKERAY AND THOMAS HARDY

ABSTRACT

THESIS

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By

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Under the Supervision of

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ABSTRACT

The present work is a careful study of the concept of womanhood held by the Brontës, George Eliot, Thackeray and Thomas Hardy. It seeks to find out, from a feminist perspective, this concept in the literary works of these female novelists and compare it with that of two male writers, who also belong to the Victorian age.

This study extensively examines the literary works of these novelists in order to reveal their point of view about man-woman relationship and the position women held in society in the Victorian age. Also 'Woman Question' affected these writers and their reactions to the principles of this movement are highlighted.

This study, therefore, offers a comprehensive view of feminist writers. And to achieve this objective, the work is neatly divided into five chapters and a conclusion as follows:

Chapter I: Introduction:

The introductory chapter provides a historical, theoretical and cultural background for the present study. It consists of six sections. Section-I precisely defines the term ‘feminism’ both as a movement and an ideology. Section-II closely examines the concepts of ‘womanhood’ and ‘feminism’ which are interrelated to each other for both are concerned about women. Section-III gives an outline of the social history of feminist movement through the past two centuries both in Europe and the United States. It helps in understanding the real position of women in western society during this period. Women indulged in a struggle
to achieve their freedom. It also refers to a number of books written by eminent writers, whose ideas paved the way for the later feminist activists. This helps in examining these ideas reflected in the novels of the writers concerned. **Section-IV** explains the nature and function of Feminist Literary Criticism compared with Literary Criticism. It also highlights the contributions of women critics who studied Victorian women novelists. In the fifth section important feminist approaches are briefly discussed. These include Gender Studies, Marxist Feminist Approach, Psychoanalytical Feminist Approach, and Minority Feminist Approach. It is through these that the 'Concept of Womanhood' held by the writers concerned is revealed. **Section-VI** examines the status of women in Victorian age.

**Chapter-II** deals primarily with the concept of womanhood brought out in the works of the Brontë sisters. The novels of Charlotte Brontë show women as strong, courageous, upright and independent, a characteristic feature that makes them emerge as eminent women of the mid-nineteenth century. Charlotte Brontë for the first time shows woman's struggle towards self-realization and a new relationship between man and woman, a relationship based on equal footing is highlighted. It also shows that she was deeply concerned about the plight of women in Victorian society and was a feminist to the core. The concept of womanhood held by Emily Brontë is revealed in her single novel entitled *Wuthering Heights*. Unlike her sisters Emily does not present her heroine in the guise of a governess nor is she concerned about the problem of class distinction. Her concept of women is both conventional and unconventional. The woman is therefore both strong and weak. The two novels of Ann
Brontë come up with the view that, though youngest, she is very daring in the presentation of female characters. She creates women who are able to defy the unjust prevalent conventions of the day.

The Brontë sisters are concerned about the 'Woman Problem', though it is referred to indirectly in the case of Emily Brontë. It also indicates that they are aware of the plight of minorities, particularly the children.

Chapter-III deals exclusively with the study of George Eliot's novels. As far as the concept of womanhood is concerned, it is observed that Eliot's women, though aspirant and intellectual, are weak, unrebellious, rash and self-negating. Most of them represent the poignancy of unfulfilled potential and repressed desires. Also George Eliot, unlike the Brontës, counterbalances both feminism and patriarchy.

In Chapter-IV the focus of study is the concept of womanhood from a man's point of view in order to compare it with that of the female novelists. Thus, W.M. Thackeray through his novels reveals that a woman should be strong enough to survive in this patriarchally-dominated society. Hence he created strong and even domineering women. The study also shows the miserable state of the women of his age. In his novels he also brings the 'Woman Question' to the forefront.

Chapter-V highlights Thomas Hardy's complex and unconventional concept of womanhood. His women are more powerful, overwhelming and domineering than his men, to the extent that they can be described as "androgynous". The only weakness women suffer from is that they indulge in flattery,
malice and envy. This study further reveals that Hardy, more than any other contemporary writer, was influenced by the feminist movement of his day. He reveals radical and progressive views in his novels that shocked the Victorian notions of morality for which he was vehemently criticized.

A conclusion of the end offers a brief outline of the findings of this study. It also sums up the implications of the present study relating to the concept of womanhood held and presented by the writers concerned.
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "The Concept of Womanhood: A Comparative Study of Some Female & Male Victorian Novelists, with Special Reference to the Brontës, George Eliot, Thackeray and Thomas Hardy" submitted by Mr. Nabil Awadh Yahya Farae, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English has been completed under my supervision.

It is further certified that Mr. Nabil Awadh Yahya Farae has fulfilled all the requirements laid down in the academic ordinances with regard to the Ph. D. degree and that to the best of my knowledge the thesis contains his own research.

[Signature]

Professor Iffat Ara
(Supervisor)
To the Fond Memory of My Father.

To My Mother, Wife & Children

THESIS
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Finally, while my debts, both general and specific, are many in a venture of this sort, I accept the sole responsibility for errors of fact and interpretation, inconsistencies, and omissions that might have inadvertently, crept into this work.

Nabil Awadh Yahya Farae
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INTRODUCTION

The fundamental objective of the present study is to find as well as to evince the concept of womanhood in the literary works of some female and male Victorian novelists. This by itself implies that one will deal with or rather write about women; how they are presented and portrayed by both female and male writers. To achieve this objective, it is significant to base this study on some basic literary theory that concerns itself with analyzing and studying the female figures in literature and it is known as the 'Feminist Literary Criticism'. It came into existence as a well-established entity in the 1960s of the twentieth century. One is required to shed light on some other relevant concepts, like feminism; and compare and contrast it with womanhood. It will also be relevant to have a precise idea about the social history of feminism and what relation it bears to women and their position in society; and how it is reflected into the literature of the Victorian Age, in particular.

The study will, in addition, concentrate on the various literary modes and critical vocabulary items conventionally employed in order to discuss them. In this chapter an attempt is made to review the critical approaches required to perform the goals in hand.

It is, therefore, essential to take into account some basic questions and to find answers to them, like: What is Feminism? What is the concept of Womanhood? Are these two concepts related to each other? If yes, in what sense? And, if not, one needs to know how and why they are not.
Introduction

These and many more questions will be dealt with in the following sections of this chapter.

1.1: What is Feminism?

'Feminism' is the movement meant for social, political, and economic equality of men and women. Since the beginning of human civilization especially Western World used to consider women as the property of men and not as equal partners in society. Hence, feminism came into existence as an advocacy of social and political rights for women to be treated equally with men. It is a collective movement that aims to raise the status of women.

Generally speaking, feminism is a view, in favour of women to affect a change in societal, political, economic and cultural constructs regarding women's place in the world. They make worthwhile contributions in a male dominated world. It is a belief that women should be considered equal by virtue of ability.

Feminism has within it many branches and levels. Thomas Gramstad, in an article entitled "What is Feminism?"; gives the following tripartite definition of feminism which she has taken from the social feminism FAQ file:

1. The belief that women and men are, and have been, treated differently by our society, and that women have frequently and systematically been unable to participate fully in all social arenas and institutions.
2. A desire to change that situation.
3. That this gives a "new" point-of-view on society, when eliminating old assumptions about why things are the way they are, and looking at it from the perspective that women are not inferior and men are
not "the norm".1

Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, in their introduction to section 4 of their book "Modern Literary Theory" entitled "Feminism", write:

Like Marxism, feminism is rooted in the political discourses of modernity, inheriting but also challenging its ideas of sovereignty, equality, liberty, rights, and rationality. Feminism is founded in the Kantian idea of an autonomous and rational self who is free to choose; in the liberal concept of rights and ownership, and the idea of citizenship and consensus in the social contract tradition of Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke2

Feminism, in short, is a universal term defining women's quest for equality with men in all areas of any given society, i.e., civil rights, economic and educational opportunities, legal rights, and equality in politics. It also means the collective empowerment of women as autonomous and that they are independent and self-defined human beings who have as much to say as men about everything that correlates to human affairs.

1.2: The Concept of Womanhood Vs. Feminism

The term 'womanhood' is considered to be less social and not as broad as 'feminism' which concerns itself with the position of women in society and their relation to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. Womanhood is mostly concerned with the personal or individual characteristic features of a woman, which are conferred on her in almost every society that is pervasively patriarchal--male-centered and

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controlled. These features are said to be biological, intellectual and cultural.

A woman has ever been identified as the opposite of man who is seen as being: active, dominating, adventurous, rational and creative. A woman, however, is viewed as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional.

In this way it becomes well apparent that one's sex is determined by anatomy and that the characteristic features that constitute what is a man (masculine) and what is a woman (feminine) are, to a great extent, cultural constructs.

This concept has been affirmed by writers like Simone de Beauvoir, who in her *The Second Sex* (1949) says that a woman is not born, but rather becomes a woman and that it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature. She is defined in relation to the man or what man is not.

Considering both concepts of 'feminism' and 'womanhood', one can easily notice that they are both related to women and are correlated to each other.

The *Feminist Literary Criticism* will be made use of in this study in order to examine the concept of womanhood in the works of the novelists concerned. One will inquire how women characters have been depicted by both women and men-novelists; what position they are given in the texts in relation to men; what attitude the female figures have towards life in general, and man-woman relationship in particular; whether they convey any message regarding feminism.

### 1.3: Feminism: A Historical & Social Background

In the previous two sections of this introductory chapter it is indicated that a perusal of some basic feminist
approaches or theories is required to explore the factor of sexual differences and privilege in the production, the form and content, the reception, and the critical analysis and evaluation of the works of literature. And, before indulging in a discussion about feminist theory and feminist literary theory it is relevant to have a glimpse of the social history of feminism.

This will enable one to have an idea about the position of women in the Western Society throughout the past two, if not three, centuries. It will also throw light on their position and the struggles they underwent in order to establish themselves, as fully independent entities in their society, how they overcame certain barriers, what they achieved, and how this movement affected various political, religious, economic, cultural, societal, familial, and artistic spheres.

Tracing the history of feminism (feminist movement) both as an ideology and a movement, one comes to know that it has been one of the most influential political and social ideas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Regarding its origin it is known that its first sparks were made visible in the eighteenth century and beyond according to critics. Sushila Singh in the first chapter of her book entitled "Feminism: Theory, Criticism, Analysis" (1997) says that Joan Kelly in a study, Women, History and Theory (1984), points out that women thinking about women and sexual politics in European society was before the French Revolution. She goes on to state that most Anglo-American studies of the women's movement acknowledge some forerunners in the English and French Revolutions and in individual figures such as Anne Hutchinson. She maintains
that the French Feminism claims a longer past and identifies *Christine de Pisan* (1364-1430?) as the first to have held modern Feminist views.

In spite of all that has been mentioned above, most of those concerned with the history of the women’s movement share the opinion that the actual inception of this movement was in the eighteenth century. In this very age the Europeans experienced a change in the way they thought about society. Modern writers questioned established social norms and modes. They were not satisfied with institutions and customs that formed the traditional European society. Not only Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire and Kant advanced radical ideas but also women asserted themselves and spoke about women’s rights. This intellectual movement of the late eighteenth century inspired women to improve the lot of the female sex.

In this pursuit the early feminists met much opposition. They carried out their radical activities with great effort. The Utopian movements of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century inspired these women to start a campaign for women’s rights. Fourierists, St. Simonians and Owenites, all of whom advocated different versions of socialism, gave women a platform from which to disseminate their ideas. And, the origins of the European feminist movement can be found in these groups. However, the climax of the movement came with the emergence of the revolutions of 1848. The revolutions, beginning in France, fostered even more radical demands, such as political rights for women.
European feminists initiated correspondence with American woman’s rights activists through new technological advances, such as the penny postage and the transatlantic cable, and through their frequent trips to the United States. These connections brought up an international movement that was active until the mid-1780. After that, the radical movement became less effective and activists reverted to a more conservative, nationalist approach. But, despite its retreat, the radical movement was still known for it challenged male dominance of Western culture and society; created a coherent and convincing ideology that made wide-ranging claims for woman’s rights and equality and advocated new roles for women. The developments were worth appreciation because they were performed with enthusiasm at a time when the world was not yet ready for such radical change. The challenges initiated by the early radical feminists paved the way for all future advancement relating to women.

The reason why the feminist movement in general and the radical movement in particular, began to flourish during the (late) eighteenth century was the presence of those educated women who were concerned about the welfare of all women. Also the reading material available through printing press led to an explosion of educated urban individuals and ensured a larger audience for the material produced by both the radical philosophers and feminists.

In France, for instance, Rousseau’s ideas often reinforced the traditional hierarchies between men and women by stating that he would prefer a homely girl, simply brought up, to a learned lady and a wit who would turn his
house into a literary circle and preside over it. He went on to say that a female wit is a scourge to her husband, her children, and to everybody; for she scorns her womanly duty and is extremely domineering. Such statements hurt the feelings of women. They challenged these hierarchies and were inspired to confront the male revolutionary ideas on women's traditional roles that had been held in place by a patriarchal society. Mary Wollstonecraft (1750-1797) was an active feminist as Sushila Singh says, who protested against the institutions that denied women any other identity except the one acquired through men. She knew about the hardships women underwent through the ages. Wollstonecraft's revolutionary fervour goaded her to write *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). This book was read with interest. It virtually anticipated all the demands of the women's movement--education, legal representation, the right to vote, the right to property, and admission to professions. In this very book Mary Wollstonecraft responds to, challenges and repudiates Rousseau's ideas. She frequently mentions him in her book. She openly attacks the writers including, Rousseau, who have written about female education and manners. She writes to the following effect:

I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare what I firmly believe, that all writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners, from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women as more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been, and consequently, more useless members of society.³

Further she writes thus:

I lament that women are systematically degraded by receiving the trivial attention, which men think it manly to pay to the sex, when, in fact, they are insultingly supporting their own superiority.\(^4\)

She also quotes Rousseau’s statement and expresses her own opinion about women:

Educated women like men, says Rousseau, “and the more they resemble our sex the less power will they have over us”. This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves...\(^5\)

Hence, it becomes evident that Wollstonecraft laid emphasis on the independence for women through access to education.

The women were therefore inspired to claim their rights. Eighteenth century feminists claimed natural equality of the sexes in organized society. They highlighted women’s disadvantaged legal and economic situation with reference to marriage and criticized women’s inadequate education which led to such unhappiness. Feminists did recognize the need for women to be spiritually, morally and intellectually independent. They also reassessed woman’s place in society and asserted that she played an equally important role in the welfare of the family. Changes in the economy, which urged women to be independent, led them to confront male opposition in matters of education and marriage. This soon led to the central issue and the development of the “Woman Question”: What ultimately should be the role of women in society?

\(^4\) Mary Wollstonecraft, 3.
\(^5\) Mary Wollstonecraft, 4.
In the early nineteenth century, the opposition against feminism was almost overwhelming. Yet feminists were able to revive the women's movement. Goaded by the ideas of a French sociologist named Charles Fourier (1772-1837), women managed to bring the woman question to the forefront once again. Fourier wrote to the following effect:

Social progress and historic changes occur by virtue of the progress of women toward liberty, and decadence of the social order occurs as the result of a decrease in the liberty of women.

Charles Fourier thus depicts or rather presents the actual position of women in the European society. It helped in the survival of women's movement. He further says:

Is there a shadow of justice to be seen in the fate that has befallen women? Is not a young woman a piece of merchandise displayed for sale to the highest bidder as exclusive property? Is not the consent she gives to the conjugal bond derisory and forced on her by the tyranny of the prejudices that obsess her from childhood on? People try to persuade her that her chains are woven only of flowers; but can she really have any doubt about her degradation, even in those regions that are bloated by philosophy such as England, where a man has the right to take his wife to market with a rope around her neck, and sell her like a beast of burden to anyone who will pay his asking price? Is our public opinion on this point much more advanced than in that crude era when the Council of Mancon, a true council of vandals, debated whether or not women had a soul and decided in the affirmative by a margin of only three votes?

Fourier's criticism of marriage as an institution and women's subordination in society led to debate and discussion. Later feminists made use of his ideas in developing their ideologies.

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7 Charles Fourier, 1
The ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft and Fourier paved the way both for the other feminist activists and the socialists who encouraged women take further steps in their struggle for freedom and make their voices heard. They also gave women a platform to speak for themselves. Prosper Enfantin, the leader of the Saint Simonians socialist movement after the death of its founder Henri, comte de Saint-Simon, inspired women to review the conditions of their own emancipation. But, as it was a movement inspired by religious beliefs the rehabilitation of the flesh being one of its goals, the search for the female messiah and free love seemed impossible. It was censored on account of its religious focus. Many women, nevertheless, advocated economic independence while referring to the “free love” doctrine. That is to say, they made use of the ideas of both: Fourier’s and the St. Simonian school of thought. In 1832, a small group of women started a women’s periodical based on these ideas and through this medium were able to approach a vast audience. La Femme Libre (The Free Women), distributed in Paris, dealt with feminist issues. And from then onwards women challenged the traditional roles in popular culture.

It was, in fact, within this period, 1830 onwards, that a new surge of feminism, started. It transformed existing institutions and enabled women to take steps toward liberating themselves from male dominance. The changing circumstances created new possibilities for feminist movement to take hold. A new breed of feminists was emerging, who would not allow men to exclude them from any realm of society. Harriet Martineau and Flora Tristan
were among them, who were known in this regard. The former had left her country France to visit America. She wrote her observations about American society in three books. Flora Tristan also represented feminists of the time. She was a writer and a representative of both international feminism and socialism in the late 1830's. Though her relations with feminists were limited, her writings had enough influence on fellow women radicals. In her Promenades Dans Loundres (1840), Tristan attacked industrial capitalism and denounced the oppression of the labouring class. She expressed her views about the sufferings of young women in London:

In order to explain such colossal prostitution, one must be aware of the immense increase in wealth in England in the last fifty years and remember that, in all nations and at all epochs, sensuality grows with wealth. The commercial incentive has become so powerful among Englishmen that it has upset all others.8

She also pointed out that no one is satisfied with partial emancipation for all are citizens of the world and are part of the great human family.

Another utopian socialist movement launched for women’s rights was sponsored by Robert Owen, the “father of socialism”. He gave women a platform from where to speak. The international women’s movement arose as part of Owenite socialism because society could be reorganized with the support of “the female half of humanity”. Many of the later feminists, such as: Ernestine Rose, William Thompson, William E. Rose and many others; were greatly influenced

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by Owen's ideals.

In the history of women's struggle for equality and freedom, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) played a significant role. Being mainly influenced by his father's utilitarian philosophical principles and views towards individuals and society, he formed the Utilitarian Society in 1823. But, when he met Harriet Taylor Mill, he was attracted by the "Woman Question", which challenged his philosophical ideas and made him decide to stray from Utilitarian principles. He believed that society would be improved only if women are given equal rights like men. Mill, during his parliamentarian years, defended women's suffrage. His last published book *The Subjection of Women* (1869) is considered to be one of the most significant feminist texts, along with Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. The book is used as a foundation by the feminists. Sushila Singh writes to the following effect:

> Of all his works, the Subjection of Women (1869) was the most controversial and provoked strong hostility. He concentrated in his book on the abilities of women and made a vigorous plea for their right to enter any trade or profession. He also pleaded for their right to practice arts, and for their right to vote.  

She quotes Mill's view that women are also victims of political oppression inflicted by men. She adds that his analysis of the effects of this use of power on both men and women is exceptionally persuasive. The crux of the book is its radical criticism of the family in which he explains that the masculine domination of the family that makes boys selfish and girls suffer is worth condemnation. In the last years of his life, he, along with his stepdaughter, Helen

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*Sushila Singh. Feminism: Theory, Criticism, Analysis. (Delhi: Pencraft International, 1997) 17*
Taylor, formed the Women's Suffrage Society in England and persuaded many women to join it. Also before his death he left half of his fortune for women's education.

It was, however, in the United States that feminism appeared as a well-organized and powerful movement. There, it arose from women's sense of alliance with one another, their shared discontentment, and from their participation in reform movements, especially antislavery which, according to Wendy McElroy, was the first organized, radical movement in which women played prominent roles and from which women's movement sprang. In her article entitled, *The Roots of Individualist Feminism in 19th Century America*, McElroy quotes Abbie Kelley, an abolitionist feminist, who says:

> We have good cause to be grateful to the slave. For the benefit we have received to ourselves, in working for him. In striving to strike his irons off, we found most surely that we were manacled ourselves.  

Many women including Sarah and Angelina Grimke, Abbie Kelley, Lucretia Mott and Luch Stone began speaking out for woman's rights and made efforts to participate equally with men in the great reform movements of the day including antislavery and temperance. They joined the abolitionist movement to work for the end of slavery. One liberation ideology led naturally to another and many women drew parallels between the slavery they were fighting against and the plight of women. The battle for the rights of the slave led them to a better understanding of their own cause. And, this growing understanding of the condition of

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woman led to the first Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. This convention, organized by abolitionists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, drew hundreds of women and a number of supportive men on the scene. They together drew up the Declaration of Sentiments, in which they demanded a wide range of changes in women’s social, moral, legal, educational and economic status. The right to vote was not their initial focus. Yet, they regarded it as one of the important demands.

After the Civil War, women’s rights leaders saw enfranchisement as one of the most important of their goals. They were extremely disappointed when the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments did not provide universal suffrage for all Americans, but extended the franchise only to black men. Many women suffrage organizations were consequently founded. The most prominent of all was The National Woman Suffrage Association, which was headed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in 1869. They both strongly opposed the Fifteenth amendment and called for a Sixteenth Amendment that would enfranchise women. Sushila Singh sums up the role played by these organizations within a period of 72 years that followed the War. She writes thus:

During the next 72 years, the quest for suffrage was found to be the one strong bond uniting three generations of women who believed with Elizabeth Cady Stanton that only through the exercise of the franchise would they eradicate the existing legal, economic and social inequalities affecting women. Though the Declaration never became an official manifesto of the movement, its philosophical rationale was taken for granted by the later advocate of women’s rights. Only after the passing of the
Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, the document acquired historic value and became an inspiring symbol of the feminist movement.\textsuperscript{11}

During the 1920s which witnessed the last campaign of the suffrage movement, the word ‘feminism’ came into existence for the first time. The appearance of this term marked a turning point dividing the long suffrage movement from modern feminism. Though they had the same goals like their predecessors, modern feminists came up with a new type of emancipation, embracing political equality, economic independence, and liberation from convention, and changed relations between the sexes. Their views were paradoxical in that they stressed, variously, women’s equality with men and differences from men. According to Leslie W. Rabine (1993), Nancy Cott has recently written that “feminism is nothing if not paradoxical”. Explaining this statement, she says:

\begin{quote}
It aims for individual freedom by mobilizing sex solidarity. It acknowledges diversity among women while positing that women recognize their unity. It requires consciousness for its basis. Yet calls for the elimination of prescribed gender roles. These paradoxes of feminism are rooted in women’s actual situation, being the same (in a species sense) as men: being different, with respect to reproductive biology and gender construction, from men.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

These controversies that characterised this period led to conflicts among feminists.

At that time, however, a spirit of social reform related to women’s work was taken into account. The feminists being fairly experienced people described themselves as

\textsuperscript{11} Sushila Singh, 18.
reformers rather than feminists.

During World War II and in the ensuing period, the feminist movement suffered decline. The old feminist activists were not replaced by new ones and therefore the old organizations lost influence. The war undermined women's egalitarian goals. And, the women only won attention as workers in defense industries.

The postwar period represented a draw-back in the history of feminist movement. The 1950s, generally speaking, formed a domestic decade during which mass culture emphasized women's family roles, disparaged career women, condemned working mothers, and labeled feminism a form of deviance. It, nevertheless, saw some important developments that would contribute to the revival of feminism. One was the rapid expansion of higher education that produced highly educated women. Another development was the steady increase in the number of women, particularly married ones, in the postwar labour force. The rise in the number of working women reflected the impact of birth control and the growth of the middle class. All these developments paved the way for the feminist revival in the 1960s.

1.4 Feminist Literary Criticism:

To know what Feminist Literary Criticism is, one should have a brief idea about the nature and function of literary criticism. Literary criticism is the analysis and evaluation of literary works. It is, in other words, the estimation of the value of a particular work.
Feminist literary Criticism has the same nature or function as that of literary criticism. The major difference is that it bases its interpretations of literature on ideas about the nature of male and female experience. Its emergence led to major developments in literary studies over the past forty years or so. Initially it reflected the political goals of feminism so that authors and texts could be judged in accordance with how far they could be reconciled with feminist ideology. Hence, it is linked to the political movement for equality of the sexes and the end to discrimination against women. It is, according to John Peck and Martin Coyle (1993), concerned both with the representation of women in literature and with changing women's position in society by freeing them from oppressive restraints.

The development of feminist criticism was mainly influenced by the cultural theory, which was done by women who were academically trained.

Almost, all feminist criticism begins from one essential perception; that is, a recognition of the patriarchal structure of society that the world is organized on terms dictated by men and to the advantage of men. This view is central to two major seminal works of feminism: Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). The former has analysed the gender bias and oppressive structure in pedagogic practices to meditate upon the women's question. She has pointed out the contradictory position of women in history. She also stated that gender oppression and patriarchal university institutions prevent the female researcher from
discovering or interpreting as a woman and that they deny access to woman’s text and suggest that the male’s vision/version of the woman is the true one. She clearly said:

Sex and its nature might well attract doctors and biologists; but what was surprising and difficult of explanation was the fact that sex—women, that is to say—also attract agreeable essayists, light-fingered novelists, young men who have taken the M.A. Degree; men who have taken no degree; men who have no apparent qualification save that they are not women.13

Woolf went on saying that even language is gendered, so that when the woman takes to writing she is forced to use the masculine tongue. The male novelists have already decided on form and structure of literary language.

The latter’s work; however, was an important landmark in the evolution of feminist criticism in the post-war period. The Second Sex is an academic study that examines women from the perspective of biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism; traces their history; reviews their treatment by five literary authors like Stendhal and D.H. Lawrence; and analyses their situation in contemporary life. Beauvior insisted on the relative yet hierarchical structure of gender in Western culture.

These two prominent works have influenced later critics. And, it was only in the late 60s and early 70s that feminism both as a movement and an ideology really began to make a substantial impact on literary criticism in general and feminist criticism in particular.

Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) is a mixture of literary and cultural criticism and political theory. Millett, in this book, tries to examine how power relations work and how men manipulate and perpetuate male dominance over women. She has indicated that sexual relationships controlled by the male reinforced gender oppression by focusing on the man-woman relationships between characters in the works of male authors such as Lawrence, Norman Mailer and Henry Miller. It was, as a matter of fact, on the basis of this and Beauvoir's work that early feminist criticism drew extensively, particularly in America in the 1970s.

Juliet Mitchell’s "Women-The Longest Revolution" (1966) examined the treatment of women's oppression in socialist theory. Opposing the socialist theorists' view in linking women's subordination to the family and private property, Mitchell proposed that women's condition was always determined by four structures: production, reproduction, sexuality, and socialization. Her analysis of women's oppression was elaborated in her second work *Woman's Estate* (1970), which also contained a history of the 1960s movements and an account of the women's liberation movement in many nations.

By the mid 1970s, women's experience as seen in female fictional characters, the reactions of women readers, and the careers, techniques, and topics of women writers was the focus of the most accessible feminist criticism both in the United States and Britain. A prominent critic who precisely advocated this approach of criticism was Elaine Showalter.
Elaine Showalter has pioneered in the field of feminist literary criticism by insisting on creating a woman-centred literary history and criticism. In her well-known book, “Towards a Feminist Poetics” (1979), Showalter sets out to offer an introduction to feminist criticism by comparing two types: the feminist critique and gynocritics. She also argues that the focus of feminist criticism should be on woman’s experience. Literature written by women inevitably contains just that. Because of their “educational, experiential, and biological handicaps,” women develop their “sympathy, sentiment, and powers of observations” to bring the substance and significance of the female experience to readers. In women’s literature, she concludes, these qualities become what Virginia Woolf termed the “precious specialty”, of a distinctly female vision. And it is this “precious specialty” that is considered by Showalter as the essential focus of gynocritics. Gynocritics, however, concerns itself with woman as a writer. Another important focus of gynocriticism has been the recovery of a female literary history and tradition. It seeks “to rediscover the scores of women novelists, poets and dramatists whose work has been obscured by time and to establish the continuity of the female tradition.”

According to Showalter, there have been three phases of female literary evolution: The feminine phase, the feminist, and the female phase. During the Feminine Phase (1840-1880), women wrote in an attempt to “equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture.” Female English writers such as George Eliot used masculine

camouflage beyond the name itself. During the Feminist Phase (1880-1920), women rejected "the accommodating postures of femininity" and used literature "to dramatise the ordeals of wronged womanhood." Female phase was in progress since (1920). Writers of this phase reject what those of the previous phases/stages promote because both these depended on masculinity and were ironically male-oriented. The literature of this phase "turns instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature".\textsuperscript{15}

From all that has been said so far, it becomes obvious that such feminist criticism is always aware of the oppression of women. One consequence of this has been the rediscovery, and republication, of a whole tradition of books by women who have been ignored by the traditional male canon. In connection with this very idea, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar published \textit{The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination} in 1979. This famous and monumental study is about the typical motifs and patterns in the nineteenth century women writers. It often concentrates on the figure or suppressed female. It lays emphasis on the distinctive female experience which has become the centre of attention of the later critics.

While American and British feminist critics have been basically concerned with thematic studies of writings by and about women, French feminist critics have been concerned with the theory of the role of gender in writing.

\textsuperscript{15} Elaine Showalter, 154
To sum up, feminist literary criticism is an approach to literature that seeks to correct or supplement what may be regarded as a predominantly male-dominated critical perspective with a feminist consciousness. It places literature in a social context and uses a broad range of disciplines, including history, sociology, psychology, and linguistics, to provide a perspective sensitive to feminist issues. It also attempts to understand representation from a woman's point of view and explains women's writing strategies as specific to their social conditions.

1.5: Feminist Approaches to the Study of Literary Texts

With this brief survey of the evolution of feminist literary criticism as a significantly independent field of study, there are some important approaches, which can be combined into four main types current in feminist literary criticism. These are: gender studies, Marxist studies, psychoanalytic studies, and minority studies.

In all these approaches there has been a general shift from a negative attack on male writing about women to a positive one in which the main aim is to redefine women's identity in men's writing. Hence, there is an attempt to redefine gender in literary studies.

The fundamental goal of making use of these approaches is the critical analysis and evaluation of the works of literature.

(i) Gender Studies:

Gender Studies are concerned with sex difference in everything, including language. The man-woman relationship in Western society is pervasively patriarchal--
that is, it is ruled by the father and is organized in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains. In a patriarchal society the masculine is defined or associated with certain traits as being active, dominating, adventurer, rational, creative; whereas the feminine is defined as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional.

Not only in real life but also in literature feminist critics identify sex-related writing strategies which presume that there is a great difference between what and how men write and what and how women write, including matters of subject, vocabulary, style, imagery, narrative structure, characterization, and genre preference. They, for instance, often describe the novel a female genre. In general, it is believed that male authors seem more interested in closure; while female writers in open endings. Feminine logic in writing is often goal-oriented. This approach will help one find out if women play primary or marginal roles in the worlds of the concerned novels (ii).

**Marxist Feminist Approach:**

According to Vince Brewton (2002), it tends to focus on the representation of class conflict as well as the reinforcement of class distinctions through the medium of literature.

Moreover, for any study to be carried out in accordance with the Marxist feminist ideology, it should examine the relation of the literary product concerned with the actual economic and social reality of its time and place.

Thus, the study will try to find out; in the works of the writers in hand; whether there is “social realism” or not;
and, if so, on what basis the social relations are established between the people in general, and between men and women in particular.

The study will also attempt to shed light on the standard of eligibility required in matters of love, friendship, and marriage. It will, at the same time, concentrate on social problems like class struggle, woman exploitation, sexual harassment of women; and the fact that these problems do occur due to economic considerations or not.

(iii) **Psychoanalytical Feminist Approach:**

As an approach, it has attracted many feminists. It bases itself on the premises and procedures of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). It seeks to uncover the "latent" content of a narrative by teasing out fantasies, fears and desires that are presumed to be informing "subtext" of any text. It deals with language and with interpretation, and introduces a significant approach that there are motives and meanings which are hidden/disguised by and work through other meanings. By doing so, it helps clarify literature on two levels: the level of writing, and the level of the character action within the text.

Psychoanalytic critics primarily focus on the individual consciousness of the author or the character rather than social conditions. They locate in texts, images of the libidinal evolitional and the oedipal figures of authority and oppression. They do read the text in terms of son-father, son-mother, daughter-father, daughter-mother relations in which personal and affectional issues are the primary interest. They also attempt to specify certain traits of a woman's language or rather feminine style of speech and
writing in sentence structure, types of relations between the elements of a discourse, and characteristic figures and imagery. It, generally speaking, constitutes an approach to the questions of good and evil, and especially of suffering and error, which plague us as humans.

This approach will accordingly help one analyse the feminine images, the language, the narrative technique, characterization in the text meant for the study, and try to find out what is explicit and what is disguised with the images drawn in the texts. It will also assist one in discovering what kind of relationship there is between the female and male characters within the scope of the family itself. Not only this but also what message is conveyed with regards to the general topic of the study, i.e. the concept of womanhood held by this writer or that.

(iv). **Minority Feminist Criticism:**

Concerns itself with other, important minorities, the most prominent being the black and lesbians. Feminist critics analyse their problems and those of other minorities. These problems include racism, xenophobia, and homophobia. These minorities usually complain of being addressed as a single section.

This will, therefore, help one look at the texts and find out if they deal with topics related to such class of people.

**1.6: Women in the Victorian Age**

The word "Victorian" simply identifies the historical era in England roughly coincident with the reign of Queen Victoria, 1837-1901, a time of rapid and wrenching
economic and social changes. These changes were concerned with the nature and role of women. That is, "The Woman Question", which led to the discussion about women’s political rights. Although women did not get the right to vote till 1918, petitions to Parliament advocating women’s suffrage were introduced as early as the 1840s. Equally important was the agitation of all married women to own and handle their own property, which culminated in the passing of the Married Women’s Property Acts (1870-1908).

This historical note leads one to shed light on the status of women during the Victorian Age. Women in general living during this period were subject to many detrimental factors that conditioned them into believing that their worth was equal to their husband’s status. Education, restrictive fashion, class and social biases all played key roles in the gender inequality. During a time of expansion, prosperity, and great social change, women for the most were still being modeled by society into ornamental figures.

From the beginning of a woman’s life, she was prepared for the duty of being a good mother, wife and hostess. Victorian parents sought a woman who could teach their daughters the genteel accomplishments which were the aims of female education. Women were supposed to know sewing, cooking, etiquette and music. Hence they were domestic purposes. Sheila Sullivan in her *Studying the Brontës* (1986) says in this regard:

...the girls were indignant of the obstacles put in the path of able women, especially those who were unmarried and needed to earn a living. At that time (and for many years to come) there were no
professions open to women, except teaching.\textsuperscript{16}

She goes on to say that most of the middle and upper classes were only skimpily educated and that many girls would never acquire more than a smattering of any intellectual subject. She maintains that girls from poor homes could become little other than domestic servants.

Married women, however, suffered a lot from degradation. This degradation existed not only in that married women were deprived of all their legal rights but that no obligations were placed in their realm. Upon marriage, Victorian brides relinquished all rights to property and personal wealth to their husbands. Women were, under the law, legally incompetent and irresponsible. According to Matha Vicinus who wrote \textit{Changing Roles of Victorian Women} (1977):

\begin{quote}

a married woman was entitled to no legal recourse in any matter, unless it was sponsored and endorsed by her husband. Being helpless in the eyes of civil authority, the married woman was in the same category with criminals, lunatics, and minors\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

The Victorian woman was her husband's property, if not slave. She was completely dependent upon him and subject to him. She had no right to sue for divorce or to the custody of her children. She could not make a will to keep her earnings. Her area of expertise, her sphere, was in the home as mother, homemaker and devoted domestic. Clear distinctions regarding gender boundaries were made: men were seen as competitive, assertive, powerful, etc. while


women were pious, pure, genteel and sacrificing. All in all, Victorian marriage was a patriarchal authoritarian institution wherein the husband was the family protector and representative.

There was, in fact, a significant impact of the role of women, particularly those who belong to lower-classes. This change was caused by the Industrial Revolution. This was evident in the explosive growth of the textile industries which brought hundreds of thousands of lower-class women into factory jobs with grueling working conditions. The new kinds of labour and poverty that arose with this revolution presented a challenge to traditional ideas of woman’s place. Middle-class women, too, took to education and could challenge conventional ideas of women. They worked as governesses in peace and nurses in the time of war.

Victorian women’s role was not the result of oppression by men. Many women enjoyed their angelic roles, some did not. The hardship they had to meet was not in the role itself, but in the lack of choice. Florence Nightingale’s passion to do something useful for her life, for instance, was so thwarted that she many times wished for death as the only release from her tortured boredom reflected in weary neutral days and endless nights. But The Lady with the Lamp, according to The Norton Anthology of English Literature, reflects the paradox of her achievements. While her organization of nurses was an important advance in hospital treatment, the image of her tending the wounded seems to reflect a traditional view of woman’s mission during this period.
Even in the field of work, the gender roles that divided work in the family did the same in the world of work. Rarely did women perform the same work as men. In jobs where both men and women were employed, the men were almost always on the way out. Many male workers resented women workers, and condemned them for taking work needed by men. But here, too, comes the great role of women (working women) who took to work not for their own sake but for that of their families. Most young women went to work in order to help their families survive in the world in which the family wage was more ideal than real. Yet, the world of wage labour proved to be liberating in small, but important ways. In fact, the heterogeneity of the city led women to question the traditional values. Mixing daily with men on the streets, offices, and factories, violating by their very presence the Victorian ideal of separate sexual spheres, they set a new standard of female assertiveness. Their earnings made them less dependent. And, by contributing to the family support, they gained new power. These experiences, of course, rendered their lives before marriage less distinct from those of men and helped them loosen the family claim.

Hence, through lack of education, pre-imposed family values, and a harsh class and social system, women in the Victorian era had a lot going against them. Everywhere they turned, they were told that they were nothing unless they were someone’s wives. A lot of changes did start taking place during this period though, and the process was a long and difficult struggle for them. Yet they were supposed to be nothing more than pretty dolls.
CHAPTER 2

The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of the Brontës
The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of the Brontës

2.1 Life and Works

The three Brontë sisters, namely Charlotte, Emily and Anne, are identical in many respects. They have had an important influence on English literature. Their parents were Reverend Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell. The couple married in 1812. Patrick was a clergyman with a degree from Cambridge. Both the parents had an interest in literature. Patrick published volumes of prose and poetry and Maria's unpublished writings show, according to critics, some literary talent.

The couple had six children: Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne; five girls and a boy. The father, being a scholarly clergyman with Evangelical views, was appointed the curate at Haworth in Yorkshire, where he spent the rest of his life, and where the Brontë children grew up. They lived in the moors of Yorkshire, which had a great impact on the sisters' writings. The Literary Encyclopedia describes the place in the following way:

Haworth benefited from the social and economic changes of the early nineteenth century and in 1820 was not the isolated, rural village beloved of Brontë myth but a bustling center with a vibrant cultural and political life. Nevertheless, Haworth village was set in some of the most dramatic and bleak scenery in England.¹

During their stay at Haworth, Maria, the mother, died from uterine cancer, and the children were left to the care of their pious Aunt Bess (Elizabeth Branwell, Mrs. Brontë’s spinster sister) and their father. Being in a state of financial crisis, Mr. Brontë sent his children to the Clergy Daughters’ School at Cowan Bridge, where tuition was provided with donations. The unsuitable conditions of the school made the girls very unhappy. Charlotte later used this school as a model for Lowood in her first published novel, *Jane Eyre*. At school, the children were taught history, geography, grammar, writing, arithmetic, and needlework. The strict code of conduct, poor hygiene, bad food, damp rooms, and regular walks in the cold led to the death of Maria and Elizabeth from tuberculosis. Hence, Mr. Brontë brought Charlotte and Emily back home. He, then, tried to educate Branwell, while Aunt Bess taught the other three sisters.

At Haworth, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, along with their brother Branwell, had enough freedom to explore the surrounding countryside. They suffered the loss of their elder sister. Still, they passed time, taking care of household pets, injured birds, and other animals; and walking in the moors. They read a number of books and created worlds of their own. It was at this very time (i.e., 1825-1831) that they started writing what came to be known as the “Brontë juvenilia”, stories of imaginary worlds in miniature books. These stories indicated their deep love for literature which they inherited from their parents.

These years of quietness had an end because Mr. Brontë found himself a victim of a lung disorder that could prove fatal. He, therefore, decided to send his children to
school again to enable them to take care of themselves if he passed away. Charlotte entered Roe Head School. Her sharp intellect and exceptional merits made her excel in studies and she gained three prizes for scholarship. In 1832, Charlotte left school to return home to help with the teaching of both Emily and Anne. She pursued her study of literature. She, along with Branwell wrote about their huge Angrian romance.

The Brontë sisters were associated with various schools during the next few years and worked as governesses. Both Emily and Charlotte traveled to Brussels to learn German and improve their French. They joined a school called La Maison d’ Education Les Jeunes Demoiselles. They worked hard and improved their linguistic skills there. Charlotte developed a one-sided romantic attachment to the married headmaster, Constantin Heger, to whom she wrote love letters for two years after her return to England.

At the end of 1845, Charlotte discovered some poems written by Emily. Charlotte, Emily and Anne soon came to know that they had all been secretly writing verse. They agreed to publish a volume under the pseudonyms: Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. The publication sold only two copies, and the sisters shifted their attention to novel writing.

Both Anne’s Agnes Grey and Emily’s Wuthering Heights were published, while Charlotte’s account of her experiences in Brussels, the Professor, was utterly rejected. In 1847, Charlotte began Jane Eyre, which got immediate success. The impact of Jane Eyre was remarkable. Her new technique to highlight the naïve sensibility of a child that Dickens,
 later used in his novels, was admired. She also presented the concept of love from a woman’s point of view. This awareness regarding feminism was a new landmark in Victorian era, which was a male dominated society.

The next year was a tragic one as Branwell, Emily, and Anne died one after the other. While Charlotte was looking after her family, she was engaged in writing Shirely, a tale, which appeared in the autumn of 1849. Her first novel, The Professor, was published posthumously in 1857 and unfinished work entitled Emma was published in 1860.

The Brontë sisters’ works won acclaim and approval by critics. Their novels turned down conventional ideas of the genre and have a prominent place in literature. They are known for their diversity, their high quality and still appeal to a large reading public.

2.2: Charlotte Brontë

Women are supposed to be very calm generally; but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties; and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do;... It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex (Jane Eyre; 12, 106).

During the Victorian age, women’s position in society was low and women were considered inferior to their male counterparts. They were deprived of all their rights: human, social, paternal, legal, political, economic, educational and professional. They could not inherit family money like their brothers. And, even if a woman owned a share it became her
husband's on marriage. They could never dream of being socially or economically independent.

In the field of education, women were not allowed to learn more than men. They were supposed to learn sewing, cooking, playing certain musical instruments (particularly, the piano). Hence, women were supposed to learn things that enabled them to become good housewives and mothers. They should learn "...in silence, with all subjection.... For Adam was first formed then Eve" (Shirely).

Men, throughout the history of mankind, considered women as weak creatures who are incapable of acquiring perfection, Victorian men being no exception. The Victorians thought that women were born for household work and looking after children. Hard labour and profession were thought unsuitable for them. Women who were well qualified had no opportunity at all. They could either be teachers or governesses. And, those who worked for economical reasons were either condemned or ignored. Also, working women lost a chance to get married.

Girls belonging to the low classes could only assume the status of domestic servants. The Industrial Revolution along with other social and economic developments did not improve the status of women who were still regarded inferior to men. The women got a chance to work in factories and mills found everywhere in the country, but they had no recognition. Also they were paid fewer wages than men for an equal amount of work.

Charlotte Brontë knew the injustice done to women hence she with her pseudonym of Currer Bell in her novels
put forward radical ideas regarding the role of women in the nineteenth century. Being a farsighted woman, she knew that society would never accept any change readily and therefore she made fiction a medium for conveying her views to the people who would read the opinions voiced by a woman.

Some of her novels captivated the attention of readers on account of a new turn to thought brought about by her style. Jane Eyre, the epitome of feminism, her main objective in life was to gain social equality. This woman reflects the concept of a new woman who is bold, outspoken, self-willed, independent and courageous on all occasions.

Charlotte’s novels; namely: Jane Eyre, Shirely, Villette, and The Professor, describe the struggle of an individual consciousness towards self-realisation. They portray neglected young women yearning for love and understanding. The novelist very well delineates the psychology of women who are sensitive to the core and find no outlet for their intense feelings. The way of presentation is very romantic and impressive.

Charlotte Brontë’s novels are quite distinguished compared to Victorian fiction in general. They do reflect the romantic conventions of the Victorian era; and are also autobiographical in some respects but they are neither stereotype nor purely autobiographies, though ‘Jane Eyre’ was re-entitled ‘A Biography’. Each of her novels throws light on the sufferings of young girls involved in love. Nearly all her novels contain strong feminist stances. ‘Jane Eyre’ and ‘Villette’, though influenced by the Gothic literature,
satirise conventions of Gothic literature. And, yet, her novels have a unique distinction in the history of literature.

Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre* alone would have been enough to win her acclaim as a great novelist. *Jane Eyre*’s first appearance on the literary scene in 1847 made its mark and won applause. Its salient features were its new theme, narrative skill and first person narration through a woman. It was a challenge to the conventional society of the time. Unlike a conventional heroine, Jane Eyre is a plain, hard-working governess, whose sense of honour and dignity enabled her to overcome the gap of status and marry a man above her class. And yet the rigid and class-conscious Victorian society could not help admiring the novel.

*Jane Eyre*’s publication was a great achievement in favour of feminism. Earlier feminist writers, especially in the field of fiction had great limitations. Also, they had no freedom of expression in matters of social and political issues. ‘*Jane Eyre*’ won great applause and was admired by many critics for its vigour, style, freshness, and character analysis. G. H. Lewis (1848) denounced *Shirely* for its problematic texture and considered it a tale rather than a novel. In an early review of *Jane Eyre*, he wrote.

Decidedly the best novel of the season; and one, moreover, from the natural tone pervading the narrative, and the originality and freshness of its style, possessing the merit so rarely met with now-a-days in works of this class.²

Kathleen Tillotson (1954:258) expressed the view that a consistent flexibility of the first person narrative related to

childhood experiences is a new turn in fiction. All those who read *Jane Eyre* approved the creative talent of the novelist without showing any prejudice to her sex. Blackwood's review (1848) stated that the novel was "a pathetic tale, so like the truth that it is difficult to avoid believing that many of the characters and incidents are taken from life".³

Also, a well-known literary personality like William Makepeace Thackeray expressed his opinion generously in a letter to the publisher to the following effect:

> It interested me so much that I have lost (or won if you like) a whole day in reading it...... who the author can be, I can’t guess, if a woman she knows her language better than most ladies do, or has had "classic education". It is a fine book, the man and woman capital, the style very generous and upright, so to speak...⁴

Mark Kinkead (1970:77), in an essay entitled, "The Place of Love in Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights", wrote thus:

> For all its faults, Jane Eyre is a cry from the heart and of the heart, a passionate book that works by involving us with the inner development of its heroine, and is at its strongest, not in the world of character, but in the sub-merged poem that is the architecture of the fiction."⁵

All that was written about Jane Eyre is applicable to the other works of Charlotte Brontë. As in *Jane Eyre*, the author has also created life-like women in *Shirely*, *Villette*, and *The Professor*. Shirely, Lucy Snowe, and Frances Henrie are, in fact, copies of Jane Eyre, with the exception

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³ Judith O’Neill, 14.
of Shirely, who was yet another Jane Eyre but was beautiful in appearance. They all had to struggle for freedom and self-integrity in a patriarchally dominated society. David Cecil, (1934:114) wrote to the following effect:

Every page of Charlotte Brontë's novels burns and breathes with vitality. Out of her improbabilities and her absurdities, she constructed an original vision of life; from the scattered, distorted fragments of experience which managed to penetrate her huge self-absorption, she created a world.6

The opinion expressed by David Cecil is an approval of all feminist writers in fiction.

Charlotte Brontë is one of the first feminist women-writers in English literature. Her novels have feminist elements along with love themes. And, it is only through this perspective that the value of her novels will be estimated. Her novels are put in the category of feminine and feminist literature. They all interpret patriarchal system prevalent in the Victorian age and magnificently depict the pressure of this system at all levels: familial, societal, class, religious, marital, economical and educational. Charlotte Brontë presents a new perspective of life related to the condition of women in the Victorian society.

The new woman who emerges on the literary scene is guided by her intellect and controlled by her own willpower. Elaine Showalter (1977), in her book entitled, "A Literature of Their Own", highlights the virtues of such woman:

The feminine writers were thus looking for two kinds of heroines. They wanted inspiring professional role-models; but they also wanted romantic heroines, a sisterhood of shared passion and suffering, women who sobbed and struggled and rebelled. It was

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difficult for the Victorians to believe that both qualities could be embodied in the same woman.⁷

Charlotte's heroines, despite all limitations demand their rights and privileges. Shirely, too, is no exception. Though quite well-off, she fights against the pressures imposed on her either by her uncle, Mr. Sympson, or by other members of her community that affects, to a great extent, the fate of all women around her.

Charlotte Brontë's female characters are rebellious by nature, and love freedom. They are always independent in spirit. They suffer a great deal on account of their adherence to their sense of integrity and have to bear adverse criticism. The author is very well aware of the hazards a woman has to overcome to achieve freedom and retain one's honour and good name. She presents a very grim picture of opposing social customs. Jane Eyre becomes a victim of the crude regime of Lowood because her aunt, Mrs. Reed, wants to punish her for her defiance. She undergoes trial and faces opposition to fulfil her desire to marry an upper-class man. When she finally defies all, she has to take care of herself. The opposition is unbearable and yet she survives. The character of Shirely, though much more privileged and well-off than Jane Eyre, resembles her in their lack of freedom and yet possessed of an imposing will-power and challenging nature. She has her will carried out by becoming Captain Shirely and takes advantage of her masculine name. In view of the existing situation the role given to Shirely would have been regarded as a usurpation of the masculine role. Shirely does play her role very well in

⁷ Elaine Showalter. A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Brontë To Lessing. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977) 103-4
order to remove any false notions about women and their place in society.

The other prominent female figures in the novels of Charlotte Brontë are: Caroline, who dominates most of the events of ‘Shirley’; Frances Henrie, and Lucy Snowe, are the prisoners of their femininity; they are rather passive, ready simply to accept and wait. And, yet, they possess free personalities. They continue to struggle and succeed in marrying men of their choice. Caroline Helstone marries her life-partner, Robert Moore, and helps him regain a new personality. Both France Henrie and Lucy Snowe marry their lovers and achieve their coveted objectives in life.

All that is mentioned above is in favour of the ‘concept of womanhood’ held by Charlotte Brontë and presented in her novels through an effective portrayal of her female characters. To make her concept clear, a careful analysis of the various themes in the four novels is required through relevant illustrations from the text. It will help to find out: what kind of women Charlotte Brontë has presented; their traits; and to what extent her view of women differs from that of the Victorian conventions and views regarding the position and roles of women in society. Moreover, some light will be thrown on how much Charlotte Brontë is influenced by the principles and views of the feminist movement, especially the principle of ‘equality of the sexes’. And, how she has revealed these viewpoints in her works.

Charlotte Brontë vividly depicts a new type of woman unfamiliar to the Victorians. She is conspicuous in all spheres of life and retains her identity and enjoys economic independence in society. It was a crusade to achieve these
ambitions in a male dominated society. Yet, Charlotte Brontë presents a woman distinguished in this regard that she is not influenced by other people's ideas of right and wrong.

Jane Eyre, an orphan child, is left in the custody of an aunt, Mrs. Reed, who resents her and favours her own children. Jane is ill-treated, humiliated, tortured, and deprived of everything for she is penniless and outcast: "Me, she had dispensed, from joining the group, saying, 'she regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance" (p.3). Jane also explains why she was neglected and even hated by this heartless woman, when she says:

..., but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and child-like disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner.... She really must exclude me from privileges intended for contended, happy little children (p.3).

As she was considered an outcast, Jane did not have a right to develop any elegant traits.

Jane submissively accepted all kinds of oppression. She knows how difficult it is to resign her will to that of Mrs. Reed and her proud son. She cannot help being meek and submissive; and yet she is not left to herself. John Reed starts insulting her verbally and ends by drawing blood from her head by throwing a book at her which she was reading. And thus the conflict between the two extremely opposite persons starts. She quietly bears what is said about her dependence on them, "you have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg..." (p.6).
But, when she is really overcome by wrath, Jane is no longer submissive. A new Jane is born. She is now a courageous woman who can no longer tolerate oppression. She decides not to remain passive and to revolt fully against tyranny. And, when she does so, she is strongly rebuked and is locked in the red room for punishment. She describes herself thus: "I resisted all the way; a new thing for me". This reflects on the theme of female independence and rebellion. By condemning her unfair punishment, she mocks at the entire patriarchal system imposed on women.

She is goaded by her free spirit to acquire true freedom. As a consequence of the doctor's recommendation, Mrs. Reed decides to send Jane to an orphanage school as a punishment. But, it enabled Jane to come into contact with a world outside her own limitations. And before leaving for Lowood, Jane; being charged of various faults, openly cursed those who brought bad name to her. She exposes Mrs. Reed and the entire Victorian society for their snobbish behaviour:

I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you, but I declare I do not love you; I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed: and this book about the Liar, you may give to your Georgina, for it is she who tells lies, and not I (p.32).

This shows that Jane, a ten-years-old girl, will be a brave woman as she dares to step out of the accepted realm of society when she reacts against unjust treatment. She questions openly the norms society decides for judging the oppressed women.

Caroline Helstone, in Shirely, has to face the same problems. Her parents turn indifferent to her, and she is left
in the care of her uncle who is cold and never understands her or her needs. Despite all her efforts, she fails to gain independence, which she yearns for. Both Lucy Snowe and France Henrie are equally lost souls, but they lack willpower and a forceful personality. They are no match to Jane Eyre who outshines all others due to her multi-faceted genius.

Jane Eyre, at Lowood, develops a strong foundation to compete her rivals. She acquires enough experience and knowledge to justify herself in all walks of life: "I....set to work afresh, resolved to pioneer my way through every difficulty. I toiled hard, and my success was proportionate to my efforts" (p.91). Life at Lowood formed her personality and widened her horizon of life. It inculcated in her a desire to be exposed to the world outside. An independent person, Jane moves away from Lowood to make better use of her talents. Hence she confesses truthfully: ".....I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I grasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer." (p.96). She becomes a governess at Thornfield Hall, where a new phase of her life comes into existence.

In ‘Shirely’, however, Charlotte Brontë reflects on the grim situation in which women found themselves in the 19th century. All their efforts at self-improvement were rendered meaningless. Caroline Helstone, for instance, tells Shirely when the latter asks her if she has ever wished to adopt a profession:

I wish it fifty times a day. As it is, I often wonder what I came into the world for. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands, and to occupy my thoughts (p.235).
Throughout the novel, Caroline laments the miserable fate of women. She, in fact, becomes the spokesperson of the women of her community. She lays emphasis on the need to adopt some profession:

I am making no money earning nothing”; “I do. I should like an occupation; and if I were a boy, it would not be so difficult to find one. I see such an easy pleasant way of learning a business, and making my way in life (p. 377)

and also condemns the discrimination made amongst men and women in matters of professional career:

...The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do; their sisters have no earthly pleasure, but an unprofitable visiting; and no hope, in all their life to come of anything better... (ibid).

Andrew and Judith Hook (Shirely: Introduction: 21) express their views thus:

As Caroline Contemplates the fates of the other unmarried women in her society, Charlotte Brontë is able to articulate her own powerful sense of the barenness of the lot of the single woman in nineteenth-century English society. Outside of marriage, no opportunity for self-fulfilment is left open to her. Self-abnegation, the complete denial of the self and its emotional needs and yearnings, she is certainly permitted... 8

Shirely gives a vivid and perfect description of the Victorian society. Charlotte Brontë has exposed the vices of tyranny and conventional backwardness.

Women being targets of all kinds of mal-treatment, Jane Eyre decides to adopt the profession of a governess and make a place for herself in society. But, Caroline

Helstone, a victim of a more conventional society, is not allowed to become a governess both by her uncle and mother. The Victorians condemned this profession and Mr. Helstone shows his disapproval thus: "While I live, you shall not turn out as a governess, Caroline. I will not have it said that my niece is a governess". He continues to say, "Pooh! Mere nonsense! I'll not hear of governessing. Don't mention it again. It is rather too feminine fancy" (205). Shirely, a typical Victorian in this regard tells Caroline frankly, "What an idea! Be a governess! Better be a slave at once. Where is the necessity of it? Why should you dream of such a painful step?" (245). On another occasion, Shirely comments in the following way, "But hard labour and learned professions; they say, make women masculine, coarse, unwomanly" (p.235). Caroline's mother expresses her opinion to the following effect:

Implicit submission to authorities, scrupulous deference to our betters (under which term I, of course, include the higher classes of society) are, in my opinion, indispensable to the well-being of every community (p.365).

Charlotte Brontë throws light on the idea of the equality of sexes both in 'Jane Eyre' and 'Shirely'. The female characters raise the issue and the novelist supports them. In Jane Eyre, for example, when Jane is appointed governess at Thornfield Hall, she again aspires for "a powerful vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world towns, regions full of life....., that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed"
(p.106). Jane Eyre is a daring personality who can very well take care of herself and get things done successfully.

The impact of education on the young heroine is such that she can live by herself and stand on her feet. She is benefited by her wide experiences. She feels that women are as talented as men and have enough potential to materialize their idea:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex (p.106).

James Diedrick (1990), in an essay entitled, "Jane Eyre and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman", writes thus:

In Chapter 12 of Jane Eyre, when Jane reflects on the sense of confinement she felt ten years earlier as she assumed her governess duties at Thornfield Hall, it almost seems as if the spirit of Mary Wollstonecraft has taken control of her pen.9

Mr. James comments on this passage by saying that though recent criticism has been sensitive to the ways in which the novel embodies its narrator's rebellion against confining custom, no attempt has been made to link the language of such passages, and indeed the terms of the novel's feminism in general, to a tradition of feminist

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discourse that originated 50 years before Jane Eyre appeared, when Mary Wollstonecraft published A Vindication in 1792. He adds that Jane Eyre can be read and taught as a fictional counterpart of Wollstonecraft's manifesto for it dramatizes its heroine's struggles with the very social constitutions Wollstone analyzes so forcefully in her essay.

In Jane Eyre, the heroine is presented as an epitome of independence and free thinking. She believes in the equality of both the sexes. She conveys her thoughts to all like when she tells Rochester: "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless? You think wrong! -I have as much soul as you – and full as much heart!" (p.249). She asserts the principle of equality in clear cut terms in 'Shirely' more than in 'Jane Eyre'. Caroline, for instance, asks Shirely: "But are we men's equals, or are we not?" (Shirely, p.226). To which Shirely, being a typical Victorian, replies: "Nothing ever charms me more than when I meet my superior-". (234).

Charlotte Brontë throws light on the principle of equality between the sexes by referring to the position of women in a patriarchal society. She abhors the idea that women are inferior to men. In 'Shirely', Chapter 7, for example, Charlotte shows how awfully women are viewed by men, when she comments on the character of Mr. Helstone in the following words,

...At heart, he couldn't abide sense in women; he liked to see them as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible; because they were then in reality what he held them to be, and wished them to be, -inferior: toys to play with, to amuse a vacant
hour and to be thrown away... (p.138).

This thought is also conveyed by Joe Scott, who believes and has a great respect for the doctrines delivered in the second chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle that states: "Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man; but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve." (p.322)

The reason is "Adam was not deceived; but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression"; Joe Scott thinks that all women throughout the history of mankind should be degenerated, subordinated, and even, ever punished for the first woman was deceived. It is for this reason that women "is [sic] to take their husbands' opinion, both in politics and religion: it's wholesomest for them" in the words of Joe. Religion is used as a means to justify men's view towards women. But, women will never keep silent; they will always present their view-points; and they will always make objections. Charlotte Brontë conveys this very thought through Caroline Helstone: "Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection..." (323). Shirely, too, in a challenging tone, expresses her opinion by adding that men fancy women's minds as those of children; and that

If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they don't read them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend (p.343).

Sheila Sullivan (1986) in her book entitled: "Studying The Brontës", writes to the following effect:
...What we would now call ‘the position of women’ – was close to Charlotte’s heart. Although no militant feminist, she felt that girls should be educated, and allowed to prepare themselves to earn their own living if necessary. Writing to Mr. William, her publisher’s reader, in 1848, Charlotte looked forward for the day when there would be a place for ‘female lawyers, ...

This brings to one’s mind the theme of love and marriage, employed by Charlotte Brontë in her novels. She wished to ridicule the social conventions prevalent in Victorian society. Her female characters are goaded by an earnest desire to express their tender feelings of love. It is love in the highest scale, love of mind and understanding. It is healthy married love for which they can sacrifice themselves. Jane Eyre is ready to stake every thing for the sake of gaining equal partnership in love. Also she is aware of her lower social position but she enjoys intellectual superiority. She can entice Rochester by her power of intellect and sense of integrity. It is a novel experience of love that forms her personality and it is the same feeling of love and passion that she has been seeking ever since her childhood; she tells Helen: “...Look here, to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken...”(65-66).

Jane has to encounter a lot of opposition to gain Rochester’s love. She is steadfast in her love though she suffers a setback when she learns he is a married man. She

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10 Sheila Sullivan, 35.
cannot bear to act as his mistress and decides to go away. She is a true follower of God and she retains her self-respect: "One idea only still throbbed lifelike within me a remembrance of God: it begot an unuttered prayer..." (292). She also refuses to marry St. John Rivers for she does not love the man; she returns to Rochester who is blind and his wife, Bertha Mason, passed away. Besides Jane was now quite well-off to be of the same status "equal-as we are!", She adds further: "I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine...To be together is for us to be at perfect concord is the result" (446).

Shirely Keeldar resembles Jane except that she is a wealthy heiress. She refuses to respond to proposals of marriage. She does not want to marry for wealth, her ulterior motive is true love for which she is ready to face all kinds of opposition. In this regard, Andrew and Judith Hook, in their introduction to the novel, write thus:

It is only within the world of love that Shirely is willing to play anything approaching the conventional woman's role. And even with Louise Moore she is rarely merely submissive. Her marriage to Moore is nonetheless the crucial index of her character; it signals her strict adherence to the truths of feeling, her complete rejection of the values of the conventional society (Shirely, 22).

Shirely has to bear the anger of her uncle, Mr. Sympson, who rages at her whenever she refuses a proposal of marriage. She despises the idea of marriage for the sake of social advantage, and chooses to love and marry Louis Moore, the tutor in the Symson household. Their marriage, according to Judith and Andrew Hook, is a triumph of
feeling over conventional reality. It also highlights Charlotte Brontë's disapproval of a superficial view of love and marriage held by most characters in the novel.

Charlotte Brontë had keen interest in the tutor-pupil relationship, and she made good use of it in her novels where the heroines play the roles of pupils and lovers simultaneously: Frances Henrie (in *The Professor*) marries William Crimsworth; Shirely (in *Shirely*) loves and marries Louis Moore, and Lucy Snowe (in *Villette*) loves and becomes engaged to Professor M.Paul.

Caroline Helstone silently struggles for the sake of her love for Robert Moore. Her life becomes meaningless and gloomy. And yet she is rewarded, in the end, by her union with him. Her case reflects the dilemma of those unmarried girls who suffer in love. Charlotte Brontë thus reviews the concept of love and how it makes itself conspicuous in all spheres of life. Caroline Helstone pities the fate of those girls who have no value in the market of marriage. She condemns their fathers who are least bothered about the future of their daughters:

...They scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands. The gentlemen turn them into ridicule: they don't want them; they hold them very cheap; they say -I have heard them say it with sneering laughs many a time – the matrimonial market is over-stocked; a doctrine as reason able to hold, as it would be that fathers have no faculties but for eating what their daughters cook, or for wearing what they sew (377).

And, Charlotte herself comments on this situation thus:

Is this enough? Is it to live? Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for something of your own to bestow it on...(Shirely, 190).
She considered the lives of those who remained unmarried worse than those of servants, and they 'degrade their nature'. She is their spokesperson in this regard. She presented some realistic characters like Miss Ainley and Miss Mann in 'Shirley'. Despite all disapproval they maintain their dignity and status.

Charlotte Brontë spared none in this regard and she also mocked at the upper-class women, represented by Blanche Ingram (Villette), Bertha Mason (Jane Eyre), and the Reeds (Jane Eyre). These women are a contrast to the protagonists. They are superficial and ordinary. Their intellectual calibre is low. Blanche Ingram, in particular, is a pompous representative of this class, who has nothing impressive about her.

Bertha Mason, is an extremist, who never adheres to society's restrictions on women's behaviour. She blatantly breaks the rules before and after she becomes lunatic. She is described by Rochester to the following effect: "I was not sure of the existence of one virtue in her nature; I had marked neither modesty, nor benevolence, nor candour, nor refinement in her mind or manners ..." (Jane Eyre, 301). Debra G.Waller (2002) comments on the character of Bertha Mason by stating that she is a more extreme case that provides the antithesis of the Angel at the hearth and a warning to Jane who might become so if she allows her passion too free a rein. She further says that Bertha was an animal, if not more than that as animals are prey to their sexual impulses without fault, but Bertha retains enough humanity for her behaviour to inspire horror. Bertha's madness, Waller adds, manifests itself as inappropriate
sexual behaviour; she is unchaste, gross, impure, and depraved. This leads to her being confined out of sight. Catherine Fry, in an essay entitled: ‘Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason: Differing Reactions to Patriarchal Oppression’, quotes Wyatt, who notes the novel’s

...doubling of the female self into the good girl Jane and the criminally passionate Bertha reflect [sic] the experiences and corresponding psychic patterns of women living. Under patriarchy, and true to their individual responses to patriarchal control, “Jane reasons out the causes and effects of women’s domestic oppression, [but] Bertha burns down the imprisoning house”

Thus, Charlotte Brontë presents a true image of a woman of her age. She also condemns the society for its injustice shown to women of that era.

2.3: Emily Brontë

Emily Brontë’s only novel, Wuthering Heights, is considered one of the greatest novels in the English language. Its publication in 1847 amazed both readers and the critics. The early reviews were both adverse and favorable. If the subject matter was disliked the novelist was admired for her creative talent and imaginative outlook on life. The brutality exhibited by the characters was condemned. One cannot approve such sickening and coarse way of life presented in the novel. One review recognized ‘rugged power’ in every chapter, but regarded the book as ‘inexpressibly painful’. Hence, such unnatural characters could not be associated with real life. Leslie Stephen

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11 Catherine Fry, Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason: Differing Reaction to Patriarchal Oppression <http://umd.umich.edu/cas/hum/eng/classes/434/charweb/PATRIARC.htm> [7 August, 2003]
thought that Emily Brontë's feeble grasp of external facts made her book a kind of baseless nightmare. D.G. Rosseti described it as a fiend of a book, an incredible monster, with its action laid in hell. Even Emily's sister, Charlotte, had to defend the book on the basis of the more respectable secondary characters.

In spite of all adverse remarks about the novel, *Wuthering Heights* is a masterpiece of its time. Ian Gregor, an editor, in the introduction to his book, *The Brontës*, comments that both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* seem to be closely related to the respective novelists. Nobody will contradict and deny the fact that *Wuthering Heights* is a myriad book. Joyce Carol Oates (1983), in an essay entitled; *The Magnanimity of Wuthering Heights*; writes to the following effect.

It is not simply in contrast to its origins that Wuthering Heights strikes us as so unique, so unanticipated. This great novel, though not inordinately long, and contrary to general assumption, not in coordinately complicated, manages to be a number of things: a romance that brilliantly challenges the basic presumption of the "romantic"; a "gothic" that evolves _ with an absolutely inevitable grace _ into its temperamental opposite; a parable of innocence and loss, and childhood's necessary defeat; and a work of consummate skill on its primary level, that is, the level of language.12

The anonymous critic of Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper (15th January, 1848), too, found this novel strange sort of book, baffling all regular criticism; yet, he writes it is impossible to begin and not finish it; and quite as impossible to lay it aside afterwards and say nothing about it. Sheila Sullivan in her book, *Studying the Brontës*,

writes that Emily’s “skill on expressing high emotion in precise symbol and image is shown throughout her poetry and prose, and it is that which makes Wuthering Heights, so poetic a novel”. Thomas Moser (1971), in an essay entitled, ‘Conflicting Impulses in Wuthering Heights, asserts that the novel comes from an imagination--English, Puritan and essentially feminine.

Wuthering Heights is an insight into abnormal psychology and it gives rise to terror, a characteristic feature of gothic novels. It also makes one feel compassionate towards some characters. According to Dorothy Van Ghent (1961: 153), Wuthering Heights presents two kinds of characters; namely, the violent figures of Catherine and Heathcliff, who are reflections of formless nature, children of rocks, heaths, and storms, striving to identify themselves with decent human beings though retaining their inhuman appetites and impulses. The second kind is the young romantic Catherine and Hareton, who are civilized and gentle human beings. The tensions and opposition they indulge in form the basic theme of the novel.

Hence, the contrast between the two houses Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange is highlighted. It further reveals the nature of both men and women and the relationship between the occupants of both houses. Wuthering Heights reveals the character of Heathcliff who is the human incarnation of this house. The atmosphere of the house is grim and serious and the inmates are rather insensitive and brutal. It is related to the local traditions

13 Sheila Sullivan, 96.
and customs of the age and it further reflects the primitive passions of the Earnshaws and Heathcliff. Thrushcross Grange, which belongs to the Lintons is unlike Wuthering Heights. The former are a set of agreeable men and women, but a closer view shows that beneath the surface of refinement there exists moral flaw, which develops the story. It is, therefore, a conflict between 'civilized decadence' and 'primitive vitality'. One is not sure who will dominate whom.

Besides the clash of ideals, the novel deals with the love-story between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. The relationship between these two is based on the concept of irresistible passion. And it is in turn related to the conflict between love and evil highlighted by men of flesh and blood. Derek Traversi (1996), in an essay entitled, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë... Imaginations Apart*, considered *Wuthering Heights* an exploration of human passion at different levels; and its effect upon human life in various ways. He also adds that basic human emotions are presented in a state of purity and concentration.

The author gives special attention to social problems and criticizes issues of 'gender' and 'class' conflict. The 'feminine' and 'masculine' characteristics are clearly highlighted regardless of sex. She brushed aside the false notion that women are physically and mentally weak and are only capable of indulging in sexual games or adopt fashions. She also dealt with issues of class conflict as they were related to the fate of her characters, especially in matters of love and marriage.
Unlike Charlotte and Anne, Emily is not autobiographical in her novel. Hence the heroine does not appear in the guise of a governess. Her theme and the selection of female characters are quite different from those of her sisters. It is not the struggle of lower class women to uplift their status in society that appealed to her. She preferred middle class men and women. She was aware about the clash of ideals and the social problems of this class affecting all others. She chose to write about intensity of passion, property-ownership, the attraction of social comforts, the arrangement of marriages, the importance of education, the validity of religion, and the relations of the rich and the poor.

As mentioned earlier, Emily Brontë's concept of women differs from that of her sisters. Her female protagonist, Catherine Earnshaw, is both feminine and masculine. Catherine is a strong female protagonist who challenges and conforms to the nineteenth-century stereotype women and their role in society. On the one hand, she challenges the social norms of the day; she is quite assertive and even indulges in physical violence. On the other hand she is not afraid of men and yet she marries Edgar Linton because she does not want to degrade herself by marrying Heathcliff. In this way Catherine abides by the ideals followed in her times by accepting the sacredness of the institution of marriage. Thus, the novel is not a negation of the white, male patriarchy. She is conspicuous amongst the lost generation. She is both loving and violent, gentle and passionate, affectionate and wilful. Her turbulent and aggressive personality rivals only that of her lover,
Heathcliff. She is an example of split personality. She is both a normal and abnormal woman. Catherine is powerful and violent both as a small child and as a young woman. She remains normal only for three years, the time at which Heathcliff was away from her.

These qualities in the character of Chaterine make her appear both 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Earlier also she appears to be untamed. This, of course, led critics, like Wade Thompson, to consider her as a woman in man's dress. For instance, Wade Thompson (1963), in an essay entitled, 'Infanticide and Sadism in Wuthering Heights, writes:

...As a child Catherine is endowed with a kind of masculine power that only the most hardened adults usually possess; she has most unchild-like resources for self-control, endurance, and sustained rebellion; and she can easily cope with pain.

The wildness and violence are visible in her nature while she used to run across the moors along with Heathcliff as if she were a small boy; also the manner she shakes the baby Hareton violently, rebukes Nelly, asking her to get out of the room, and then gives a blow to Edgar with whom she is otherwise quite intimate. These aspects of her character are highlighted by Nelly Dean, her housekeeper, who describes her to the following effect:

From the hour she came downstairs till the hour she went to bed, we had not a minute's security that she wouldn't be in mischief. Her spirits were always at higher-water mark, her tongue always going-singing, laughing, and playing everybody who would not do the same. A wild, wicked slip she was but she had

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the bonniest eye, the sweetest smile, and the lightest foot in the parish (68). Nelly also adds further: But she was so proud, it became really impossible to pity her distress, till she should be chasened into more humility (90). Her father, too, found fault with her:

Nay, Cathy, I cannot love thee; thou art worse than thy brother. Go, say thy prayers, child, and ask God’s pardon. I doubt thy mother and I must rue that we ever reared thee (68).

Wade Thompson states that the disintegration of Catherine’s personality begins with the Thrushcross Grange episode. She fails to perceive a “radical change” in her relation with Heathcliff, and cannot understand his behaviour after her return to Wuthering Heights. Her attitude towards him remains as it was before puberty, but he recoils “with angry suspicion from her girlish caresses”. This critic further indicates that in Heathcliff’s presence Catherine exhibits the same masculine endurance of pain and contempt for weakness that characterized her childhood. When Heathcliff dashes hot apple sauce in Edgar’s face she blames Edgar for provoking him, adding, “he’ll be flogged; I hate him to be flogged I can’t eat my dinner”, and she contemptuously remarks: “Well, don’t cry...You’re not killed”.

Wade did not refer to the fact that Catherine was affected by the cultural civilized mode of life at Thrushcross Grange. Hence, Nelly thinks, “Our young lady returned to us, saucier, and more passionate, and haughtier than ever” (109). She returns home in much improved form, and
Healthcliff is just the same disagreeable one and thus she mocks at him. This change in her personality as a woman makes her accept the proposal of marriage by Edgar Linton, who, according to her, will enable her to be "the greatest woman of the neighbourhood", and that she will be "proud of having such a husband". Here, it is obvious that she wants to avail of the social comfort of life by marrying Edgar, though she knows well that she belongs to Heathcliff since she became aware about the relevance of love.

There is a clash of ideals within Catherine. She is aware of her deep love for Heathcliff, which is of primary significance for her. And yet she is also a victim of conflict. She admires the life of the Lintons. Class is also a factor in making her take this fatal decision. Being condemned by Hindely, Catherin's brother and the new master of the Heights, Heathcliff will socially degrade her if she marries him.

Catherine cannot help feeling her attachment to Heathcliff. She exhibits her powerful hold over love. In spite of all attraction towards the life-style of Edgar, her love for Heathcliff is still very abiding. Hence she confesses in front of Nelly the difference between her love for Edgar and that for Heathcliff:

My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly I am Heathcliff. He is always, always in my mind...so don't talk of our separation again (109).

Catherine knows well that by marrying Edgar she will be socially elevated and enjoy a "calm, happy life" with her rich
husband, but with the return of Heathcliff after three years, she ceases to be ‘feminine’ any more and becomes tough and ‘masculine’ as before. She receives Heathcliff in the Grange contrary to Edgar’s wishes. And she favours Heathcliff when the two men indulge in argument. She condemns her husband for crying; scorns his “whinning for trifles”, and “idle petulance”. Her motto is to support the strong against the weak; there is no place for the weak in her view. She further insults her husband by telling him, “if you have not courage to attack him; make an apology, or allow yourself to be beaten”. Heathcliff is actually the source of inspiration that not only checks and controls her but also stands by as an edifice of support.

Catherine’s short span of life had a marked influence on all including Heathcliff. For instance, when she mocks at him “for shame and pride threw double gloom over his countenance, and kept him immovable” (37). Heathcliff later asks Nelly “make me decent, I’m going to be good”. On another occasion, he confesses, “Well, I cried last night, and I had more reason to cry than she” (50). Nelly also adds, “he struggled long to keep up an equality with Catherine in her studies, and yielded with poignant though silent regret” (61). He also “howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears” (153). There is strong emotional closeness between them, “about her I won’t speak; and I don’t desire to think; but I earnestly wish she were invisible: her presence invokes maddening sensation” (295). Edgar is equally dependent upon Catherine, “and believed himself the happiest man alive on
the day he led her to Gimmerton Chapel” (81), as Nelly describes him in the above words.

Catherine Earnshaw is a real enigma who becomes mature in her childhood but grows childish as a woman. Hence she herself finds life difficult, “I wish I were a girl again”, she cries pathetically, “half savage and hardy, and free; and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them”. She yearns to be strong as well as young. She becomes physically and spiritually weak and no-one can relieve her spirits: “but Catherine made a spring and he [Heathcliff] caught her, and they were locked in an embrace from which I thought my mistress would never be released alive” (147).

And, she ends saying, “If I’ve done wrong, I’m dying from it”.

Despite her isolation Emily Bronte is superior to Charlotte in this regard that she has presented a variety of female characters with distinct human traits who are most unlike each other. Also, Wuthering Heights does not contain a number of characters except members of two families and yet they are quite unusual and distinct. She has a fair amount of knowledge about the nature of man in general and women in particular, whom she knew very well.

Emily’s rich imagination creates two extremely opposite characters in the same novel. If Catherine is rough and defying in her way of life, Isabella Linton, Edgar’s sister, is quite foolish and irrational who makes a wrong choice. She is inclined towards a man who is the rival of her brother. Her refinement is put to a test by the cruelty and uncultivated nature of the man of her choice. She suffers on account of her wrong decision.
Isabella Linton is both immature and childish in her acts. Her first impression is that of an irrational and impudent person. She is very particular about her intense feeling of love for Heathcliff and is envious of Catherine. She does not grow up to be mature but becomes more wayward. She also grows suspicious and offensive. Regardless of all the warnings given to her by Catherine and Nelly, she falls in love with Heathcliff. Despite Catherine’s description of Heathcliff’s true nature, she foolishly replies: “You are a dog in the manger, Cathy, and desire no one to be loved but yourself”. She is goaded by foolish love and does not bother to know the man. She is so arrogant that she depends on her judgment and tells Catherine, “I love him more than ever you loved Edgar; and he might love me if you would let him”. Catherine tries to advise her to be cautious against a wilful man, but Isabella angrily responds, “For shame! For shame! You are worse than twenty foes, you poisonous fiend”. Isabella is both cruel and rash in her decisions. She seeks Nelly’s support, saying,

And I must suffer for her (Cathy’s) egotism! All, all is against me; she has blighted my single consolation. But she uttered falsehoods, didn’t she? My Heathcliff is not a fiend: he has an honourable soul, and a true one, or how could he remember her? (122)

She indulges in self-consolation. Nelly also advises her to give up a man like Heathcliff who is unreliable. But she is too stubborn to listen to her. Her foolishness leads her at the brink of humiliation and misery. She even elopes with Heathcliff and spoils the name of her family.

Isabella falls a prey to the evil designs and revengeful nature of Heathcliff. He is most insensitive about her.
Catherine tells Heathcliff about Isabella's deep passionate love for him and he speaks of her: "mawkish, waxen face". On another occasion, he is full of derision about her romantic admiration and he describes Isabella to Nelly, "Now, was it not the depth of absurdity – of genuine idiocy – for that pitiful, slavish, mean-minded broach to dream that I could love her? ....I never, in all my life, met with such an object thing as she is". He dares to say this in Isabella's presence.

Isabella's decision to marry Heathcliff makes her brother resentful: "she is only my sister; not because I disown her, but because she had disowned me"; and "she degenerates into a mere slut", "promising that I should be Edger's proxy in suffering, till he could get hold of him". Emily Brontë thus views women in the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century. She gives a vivid description of how women were treated during this age. She is critical about the ill-treatment of women in the Victorian era. She wonders how women have to struggle against the activities of a male-dominated society and how she herself was a mute sufferer.

Isabella feels sorry for her passion for a monster;

Monster! Would that he could be blotted out of creation, and out of my memory. He's not a human being, and he has no claim on my charity. I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death, and flung it back to me.

Yet Isabella attempts to usurp his authority: "he says he has married me on purpose to obtain power over him [Edgar]: and he shan't obtain it –I'll die first". She managed
to escape to London, where a son is born to her named Linton, and dies there when he grows twelve years old.

Emily Brontë gives a new turn to the story by putting an end to the peculiar life style of the members of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Catherine Earnshaw’s daughter, Catherine Edgar, falls in love with Hareton Hindley and this soft feeling of love which is close to goodness ends all obstacles in the way of love-making like illiteracy, class distinction and economic difficulties.

Catherine Edgar emerges as a caring and loving woman. She is more far-sighted and sensible than her mother. She is able to take care of her emotional self even during the difficult moments of encounter with Heathcliff, and remains steadfast all along. She grows up at Thrushcross Gange; among refined and cultured men looked after by her father and nurse. She is, no doubt, an extremist like her mother and she does retain the independence of mind and spirit found in her mother and Nelly describes her thus:

She was the most winning thing that ever brought sunshine into a desolate house: a real beauty in face, with the Earnshaws’ handsome dark eyes, but the Lintons’ fair skin and small features, and yellow curling hair. Her spirit was light, though not rough, and qualified by a heart sensitive and lively to excess in its affections. That capacity for intense attachments reminded me of her mother: still she did not resemble her; for she a gentle voice and pensive expression: her anger was never furious; her love never fierce: it was deep and tender. However, it must be acknowledged, she had faults to foil her gifts. A propensity to be saucy was one; and a verse will...

(165).

It describes Catherine’s character well. All these traits are reflected in her personality in the novel. When she is
sixteen, she is described as “a happy creature, and an angel, in those days”. She is a loving young lady who cares for her ailing father. She agrees to marry Linton Heathcliff though she knows she will have to go back to Heathcliff, yet she goes to marry his ailing son; and thus proves that she is a caring woman. She treats Linton as a brother rather than a husband, and acts as a nurse to a sickly child, “stroking his curls, and kissing his cheek, and offering him tea in her saucer, like a baby”(174). Also she makes the bed comfortable for him and offers a helping hand to make their married relationship strong:

I’m a woman –and I’m certain Linton would recover quickly if he had me to look after him I’m older than he is, you know, and wiser, and less childish, am I not? And he’ll soon do, as I desire him, with some slight coaxing—he’s pretty little darling when he’s good. I’d make such a pet of him, if he were mine.(217)

The emotional character of Catherine, unlike her mother’s, can be described in the sense that it was not a torrential love affair with Heathcliff’s son. It was the cause of her tragic life. Unlike her mother, Catherine Linton did not like Heathcliff nor did he. Edgar and Nelly gave an account of the strong way of life Heathcliff led and how it affected her family. Once she chanced to live in Wuthering Heights and with Heathcliff, it affected her personality and she lost all her liveliness. She challenged him which brought to light all his agony and suffering due to the intense emotional attachment he had to her mother. She is dauntless hence she told Heathcliff: “I’m not afraid of you”. Later, she also speaks in a defiant manner and her words bear upon the difficult situation Heathcliff is involved in:
Mr Heathcliff, you have nobody to love you; and however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty arises from your greater misery. You are miserable, are you not? Lonely, like the devil, and envious like him! Nobody will cry for you when you die! I wouldn't be you!(240)

Thomas Moser's (1971) views about the rebellious nature of Catherine with special reference to her hot debates with Heathcliff in which he regards as an attempt on her part to bring out the cruel villain in Heathcliff or to excel herself in defence of women's cause.

Catherine Linton has also mocked at the lack of refinement in her cousin Hareton. She does not regard him as her equal in matters of social contact. But when she becomes a widow and finds herself lonely and depressed, she is attracted towards Hareton. She apologises for her former offensive behaviour. She even begins teaching him to read books. This brings them close together. Towards the end of the novel, Nelly informs Lockwood that they intend to get married on the New Year's Day.

Catherine develops a feeling of love towards Hareton despite his lack of refinement. Unlike her mother, she wants to marry for love, and overlooks other attractions. It shows that she is very realistic in her views on love and marriage.

Besides many important messages in this novel, the main emphasis is given to the development that takes place in the characters. *Wuthering Heights* is a story about love that deals with the social classes and the suppression of true feelings. It is a moving novel reflecting on the fate of characters who discover themselves. The characters have various aspects of their personality. Catherine Linton is a duplicate of Catherine Earnshaw, but they are poles apart.
in their ways of life. The mother is evil and selfish while the
daughter is kind and innocent.

The various female characters hardly play significant
roles in *Wuthering Heights*, including Frances, Mrs.
Earnshaw, the elder Mrs. Linton, and Zillah. But, the role
played by Nelly Dean is really important. She is related to
all those who love a smooth way of life. She is viewed by
Heathcliff not merely as a servant, but one in whose
presence he can freely open his heart. According to
Lockwood, Nelly is not simply a "fixture along with the
house", but rather a storyteller that has insight into the
legacy of *Wuthering Heights*. To Catherine Earnshaw, Nelly
is a mother, whose loving guidance is a source of comfort.
Her daughter, Catherine Linton, considers Nelly as a
spiritual guide. Even Isabella goes to her in hours of trouble
to seek comfort and relief from her terrible encounter with
Heathcliff.

Nelly Dean acts as a mother to all the children in
*Wuthering Heights*. Emily Brontë, being deprived of the love
of her own mother, has given expression to her own
experience. According to Wade Thompson,

> The world of this novel is a world of sadism, violence,
> and wanton cruelty. This is a world in which the
> children, without the protection of their mothers,
> have to fight for life against adults who show almost
> no tenderness, love, or mercy.\(^\text{15}\)

There is a reversal of human emotions like love,
kindness and hatred. One has to be tough and rebellious in
order to survive.

\(^{15}\) Wade Thompson, 97
This critic lays emphasis on the fact that the children, without the care of their mothers, face a fierce struggle for survival against hostile adults who seem obsessed with the desire to kill or disable them. Emily Brontë thus attacks the Victorian society, which is deprived of all fatherly and motherly emotions. Children lead a miserable life. Instead of trying to compensate the loss of the mother's care and protection, the elderly ones both educated and uneducated do not pity children. Their treatment is inhuman and unnatural.

2.4: Anne Brontë:

The youngest Brontë sister, Anne, like the other two novelists has shed light on the role of women in the Victorian era. Anne Brontë is not as eminent as Charlotte and Emily, and her early reviewers and critics have not done justice in their assessment of her two novels, namely *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. All of them, including her own sister, Charlotte, severely criticised her during her lifetime and even after her death. In the twentieth century, however, critics discovered the creative talent lying dormant in her work and she could hold an equally prominent position with her sisters. Some of these critics regarded her as a pioneering novelist, both in her choice of subject matter and narrative technique. Tim Whittome (2002) quotes Elizabeth Langland who, in her *Book of Assessment of Anne Brontë's Works* writes: “Anne was one of the first writers to adopt a woman as narrator.... Anne also innovates in her choice of heroines both in Agnes
Grey and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. Others thought that Charlotte in her most successful novel, Jane Eyre, made radical changes in her writing techniques for which she is indebted to Anne, who nine months earlier created her plain, young governess Agnes Grey. The following abstract, from Stevie Davies’s speech addressed at Howarth in 1999 to celebrate the 150th death anniversary of Anne Brontë, depicts the personality of Anne as a renowned writer:

Anne Brontë is generally regarded as the most passive and unadventurous of the Brontë children: 'Dear gentle Anne' (Charlotte), “nothing, absolutely nothing’ (Branwell). This is seriously to misjudge her. Her background and upbringing were markedly different from her sister, as were her life-experiences. Shy, she may have been, but she was keenly observant, well placed to understand life, and she possessed a strong sense of justice. Deprived of the home life she wanted, she became a radical feminist, protesting against the social injustices of education, property laws, men, even of God. Her novels are revolutionary tracts for the times, while her poems are a tribute to her openness and 'truth-telling'.

A close perusal of her novels shows that Anne Brontë, like the contemporary novelists, being conscious of the developments in Victorian society, incorporates these social changes in her works in an unusual manner. Being socially conscious, the novels written by her highlight the problems of Victorian England in the nineteenth century. She aimed at and also wished to uplift the down-trodden, including women, and to help them fight for their rights and privileges.

Anne Brontë was another Jane Austen. She, too, laid emphasis on the concept of domesticity in English fiction. Her novels also assert the cultural significance of marriage and family and their relevance in modern life. Both the novelists regarded the selection of the spouse of primary concern both to the individual and society, because both are responsible for the moral education of young people, who will rear and educate the next generation. It also requires dependence upon past experiences and the wisdom involved in it. Family is an abiding reality in Anne Brontë’s novels which in turn is related to marriage. She lays emphasis on freedom of choice in matters of love and marriage. Her novels resemble those of Jane Austen on account of social analysis of the changing world of Victorian England, especially in the realm of marriage, family-relations, and increasing freedom of women.

Anne Brontë’s novels can be read in the context of the nineteenth-century feminist ideas. In this perspective one can easily perceive Enlightened feminism affecting the status of women, female education, marriage, the family and the representation of women in literature. The same ideas are depicted in Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). As both women are concerned about the various roles of women in their times, Anne Brontë may be regarded a “feminist moralist”, who skilfully deals with women and turns them into effective feminist characters. She attacks the laws of marriage, the falsity involved in the mutual relationship between men and women. It is for this bold assertion that she became the target of attack of the early reviewers and critics. One can
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quote a few statements relating to Anne's two novels to show the effective style of the novelist who has left an impact both on critics and readers. For instance, in 1848, in Douglass Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper, an anonymous critic of *Agnes Grey* wrote: (Quoted from Web-log: Stephanie Noss: Agnes Grey by Anne Bronte)

We do not actually assert that the author must have been a governess himself to describe as he does the minute torments and incessant tendiums of his life, but he must have bribed some governess very largely, either with love or money, to reveal to him the secrets of her prison house, or, he must have devoted extraordinary powers of observation and discovery to the elucidation of the subject"  

Her second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, is even more effective and defying in its presentation of women-protagonists, a factor that led many critics to slam the book. According to Tim Whittome (2002), the reviewer in Sharp's London Magazine, for example, stated that his article on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was written to warn his reader, especially female reader, against reading the book. He was confident the writer was a man rather than a woman, and condemned the "profane expressions, inconceivably coarse language, and revolting scenes and descriptions by which its pages are disfigured" The Spectator accused the author of having "a morbid love of the coarse, not to say of the brutal." An American critic, however, wrote in the North American Review:

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17 Tim Whittome, 3

18 ibid
All the characters are drawn with great power and precision of outline and the scenes are as vivid as life itself..., but that it brings the reader 'into the closest proximity with naked vice, and there are conversations such as we hoped never to see printed in English.\textsuperscript{19}

And yet one may assert that Anne Brontë is a realist, with all the implications that the word may have. Anne Brontë confirmed this in her preface to the second edition of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, a few months later, and defended her motives in the way she had presented her subjects:

... when we have to do with vice and vicious characters, I maintain it is better to depict them as they really are than as they would wish to appear... My object in writing the following pages was not simply to amuse the Reader; neither was it to gratify my taste, nor yet to ingratiate myself with the Press and the Public: I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it\textsuperscript{20}

Even in her first novel, she began with this statement: "\textit{All true histories contain instruction}"\textsuperscript{20}, which indicates that she adopted the style of a realist.

In \textit{Agnes Grey}, Anne Brontë deals with the problem of a woman's place in society; the struggle she undergoes to achieve her independence in a male-dominated, or rather patriarchal society; and her inability to choose her own husband. Though the author got inspiration from her own life and experiences to write this novel, the account of Agnes's life constitutes a quiet but sharply-pointed critique of the life of a governess and her dealings with the children at a time when a governess was considered to be a commodity with a low-market value or an inferior person in

\textsuperscript{19} ibid
\textsuperscript{20} Anne Bronte: \textit{The Tenant of Wildfell Hall}. (London: The Penguin Popular Classics, 1994) 18
the house of her master. It vividly describes the unfair treatment given to a governess at the hands of her employers as well as her charges, who are supposed to be kind and good to her.

Agnes Grey, the young inexperienced woman, struggles in life to gain her independence. She feels disgusted as she watches her middle-class family fall into a state of poverty, which was caused by her father's bad investments. She has no experience and no skills except the education she got through her accomplished mother. She is goaded by a desire to help her parents and hence she makes an appeal to them to allow her to act as a governess for it was the only available career for a woman in the Victorian era. Her wishes are granted. She is still considered very inferior in the eyes of all those around her. Agnes unburdens herself thus:

...they talked over me or across, and if their eyes, in speaking, chanced to fall on me, it seemed as if they looked on vacancy—as if they either did not see me, or were very desirous to make it appear so. It was disagreeable, too, to walk behind, and thus appear to acknowledge my inferiority; for in truth, I considered myself pretty nearly as good as the best of them, and wished them to know that I did so...(167-68).

Even in church where all are supposed to be equal, the vicar also adopted a similar attitude towards Agnes; "though I was standing before his face". This, in fact, is the real status of a governess in the Victorian society.

Besides this ill-treatment and torture Agnes has yet another serious problem in the male-dominated society. She has to deal with a seven-year-old boy, Tom Bloomfields, whom she takes charge of along with his sister, Anne, in her
first position. The moment Agnes meets Mrs. Bloomfield, she is struck by her coldness and lack of sympathy. Agnes is viewed as part of the household machinery by her employer and that she has to serve her pleasure. She also comes to know that Tom controls everything, including his sister, mother and the schoolroom. She further learns that he is a pampered child, allowed to dominate all and everything. His gender gives him a status in the household that he quickly learns to exploit. It is a picture of a patriarchal society which gives man the right to dominate for he is male.

Anne Brontë, in this novel, attacks the Victorian society for its rules and regulations relating to the sexes on gender difference. Tom Bloomfields, a seven-year-old boy, starts his relationship with his governess, Agnes, by exerting his male control over her. This behaviour is not viewed as strange by either his mother or sister. From the beginning, he insists that Agnes watch him ride his rocking horse, "loudly calling on me to attend to it" Then, "ordering his sister to hold the reins he mounted and me stand for ten minutes, watching how manfully he used his whip and spurs" (41). Agnes feels humiliated in this regard. Tom has thus played a very domineering role taking advantage of his sex. She, in fact, never gains back her control of the schoolroom. Agnes gives expression to her pent up feelings:

My task of instruction and surveillance, instead of becoming easier as my charges and I got better accustomed to each other, became more arduous as their characters unfolded. The name of governess, I soon found, was a mere mockery as applied to me; my pupils had no more notion of obedience than a wild, unbroken colt (49).
Agnes's position is untenable. She could not control either of the children because she has never been given any authority to enforce normal rules, she sums up her position as a mere mockery.

Agnes finally loses her position with the Bloomfields because she is unable to enforce authority and make the children disciplined. Every time something happens in the schoolroom, Agnes is blamed for it. When Tom, exerting his male priority once again, misbehaves badly, he is not punished rather he is rewarded for his behavior. To quote an instance in the schoolroom when Tom is told by his governess to pick up his possessions, he indulges in a temper tantrum, knowing that he will not be questioned:

Tom was in such a fury that he flew upon the table, scattered the bread and milk about the floor, struck his sister, kicked the coals out of the coal-pan, attempted to overthrow the table and chairs, ...but I seized upon him, and sending Mary to call her mama... and when the matter was explained to her, all she did was to send for the nursery maid to put the room in order, and bring Master Bloomfield his supper...[72].

Then, to Agnes he says, "There now, Miss Grey! You see I have got my supper in spite of you: and I haven't picked up a single thing!" (73) An incident like this is very discouraging for Agnes, who often has to face such situations in this family. Her attempt to discipline the children is of no value because a seven-year-old boy's gaze is worth more than hers for he is male.

In her second position, Agnes faces another situation as bad as the one at Bloomfields. The children are older and
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unruly. The Murray children pay no heed to Agnes’s instructions as the other children did. When she ventures to complain to Mrs. Murray, she is told that if she wants to continue her assignment, she must not meddle with their affairs. Once again Agnes has a setback to her power and position as a governess. Like the Bloomfields, the Murrays expect her to impose discipline upon the children without letting her exercise any authority. So, she is declared incompetent. But, the children are being spoilt, especially the boys, merely on account of a male dominating society. The first conversation held between Mrs. Bloomfield and Agnes about the nature of her children reveals the negligence of the parents in Victorian society, “You will find them not very far advanced in their attainments”, she tells Agnes,

...for I have had so little time to attend to their education myself, and we have thought them too young for a governess till now: but I think they are clever children, and very apt to learn, especially, the little boy: he is, I think, the flower of the flock—a generous, noble-spirited boy, one to be led, but not driven, and remarkable for always speaking the truth. He seems to scorn deception (36).

In addition to the theme of the degrading treatment meted out to governesses, Anne Brontë deals with the problem of how girls are brought up in the Victorian era. She mocks at the mothers who let their girls think only in terms of accomplishments and a wealthy marriage. They, unfortunately, do not encourage their daughters to make a wise choice of husbands. They do not give them enough guidance to lead a successful life. Anne Brontë believes that
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girls are taught only about affluence and pleasure. They are ignorant about an ideal way of living. Money, beauty and high class status are matters of great concern for them. She proves this through a conversation between Rosalie Murray and Agnes, when the former asks the latter about her sister's husband:

'Is he rich?'
'No—only comfortable'.
'Is he handsome?'
'No—only decent'.
'Young?'
'No—only middling'.
'Oh mercy! What a wretch!'

Thus, through the character of Rosalie Murray Anne Brontë exposes the wrong concept of marriage that was held in the Victorian age. This girl, who is considered unamiable, ignorant, and wrong-headed, reflects the traits of the young girls of her age who are good for nothing and fail to attract the attention of men around them. Beauty is misused by them and it turns out to be a curse than a blessing. And, Agnes expresses her opinion thus, "why so much beauty should be given to those who made so bad a use of it, and denied to some who would make it a benefit to both themselves and others" (215).

The character of Rosalie Murray is an example of a typical Victorian girl whose aim in life is to settle down successfully. She tries to draw the attention of possible suitors, even if they are already married and yearn to have
another wife. She even goes to the extent of entertaining one gentleman after another and rejecting him thereafter. And, when she is forbidden to indulge in such pursuit, she is extremely bored. It leads on to an unhappy marriage. She marries a man she hardly approves of merely because his house and gardens are beautiful and her mother thinks it worthwhile to do so. She is therefore sold off to a man she does not love; and it is an example of advantageous marriage. Rosalie becomes a victim of male control and feels unhappy at the prospect of being married to an ugly husband, a domineering mother-in-law and a small child she does not care for. She is herself responsible for her bad luck on account of pride and delay in getting married to a suitable person. She attempts to rebel against her husband who neither supports her economically nor allows her independence of mind and spirit. He rather confines her into the countryside.

Anne Brontë has spared no detail in describing and illustrating the fatal consequences of the deep-rooted conventions that were quite common in the Victorian society. She frankly tells her story in a very detailed and interesting way. According to her, love, romance, and even the freedom of choice have no existence in the diction of the Victorians. She apparently shows that these people have no affections or principles to sell off their own daughters like anything else. All that concerns them is the family status and the material gains that they may have in return. Agnes, the narrator, describes vividly the attitude of Rosalie Murray and her mother on the day of her engagement:
Rosalie was pleased with the thoughts of becoming mistress of Ashby Park; she was elated with the prospect of the bridal ceremony, and its attendant splendour and éclat, the honeymoon spent abroad, and the subsequent gaieties she expected to enjoy in London and elsewhere; she appeared pretty well pleased too, for the time being, with Sir Thomas himself, because she had so lately seen him, danced with him, and been flattered by him;... It seemed a horrible thing to hurry on the inauspicious match, and not to give the poor creature time to think and reason on the irrevocable step she was about to take. I made no pretension to “a mother’s watchful, anxious care”, but I was amazed and horrified at Mrs. Murray’s heartlessness, or want of thought for real good for her child; and by my unheeded warnings and exhortations, I vainly strove to remedy the evil (217-218).

Anne Brontë achieves her objective of giving a realistic description of life and her liberal views concerning the status of women in the Victorian period compared with that of men and also throws light on man-woman relationship both within and out of marital life, and the rights that women enjoy as partners in social life in the context of the theme of romance and marriage. She also gives contrasting and similar images and ideas concerning romance and marriage of the time. She further shows the conflict of good and evil through various relations. The descriptions of the different aspects of life, fictional as well as real, are amazing. Critics call her ‘a spy in the world of the gentry.’ Stevie Davies’ comment about her observation reflected in the writing of Agnes Grey as follows:

As a toughly realistic account of unsavoury realities behind the door of the respectable gentry, this novel is faithful testament to the story of Anne’s experience as a governess. What a subversive this deep, shy, proud and observant woman must have been to have in your house. A spy in the gentry world, she seems to have nipped upstairs at bedtime to note it all down
in her diary... The voice of authentic personal witness is at the center of Anne’s work.\textsuperscript{21}

As stated above Anne Brontë, in both her novels, \textit{Agnes Grey} and \textit{The Tenant of Wildfell Hall}, depicts good marriages versus bad ones. In contrast to the story of Rosalie’s marriage, that of Agnes’ parents is against this kind of marriage. Agnes’ father was not a wealthy man, and Agnes’ maternal grandfather refused to have him. He would only consent to it if his daughter agreed to be disowned. They ultimately got married, and despite monetary hardships they had a very happy life. Agnes narrates the story of her mother by saying:

My mother, who married him against the wishes of her friends, was a squire’s daughter, and a woman of spirit. In vain it was represented to her, that if she became the poor parson’s wife, she must relinquish and her lady’s -maid, and all the luxuries and elegances of affluence, which to her were little less than the necessaries of life... but she would rather live in a cottage with Ritchard Grey than in a palace with any other man in the world. (16).

Though Mrs. Grey enjoyed life with this poor man, she had to bear the ill-treatment and neglect shown by her own father and friends. Hence, love triumphed over wealth and social position. She also remained faithful to her husband even after his death. She proved to be steadfast. Her refusal of the proposal of her father shows rebellion against male control. Her father after thirty years asked her to repent for her wrong choice and return to her family to be an heiress to his fortune. But she stuck to her own way of life.

\textsuperscript{21} Stevie Davies, 2
Agnes, the heroine, is also like her mother. Though she failed to act as a successful governess, she found happiness by marrying a man of her choice. As her family was not quite well-off she chose to live with a man who could offer her better prospects of life. Mr. Weston was a suitable person for her and Agnes considers him as "the morning star in my horizone, to save me from the fear of utter darkness". Agnes fails as a governess, but succeeds both as a wife and a mother.

Anne Brontë's other novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, also, deals with the theme of marriage. It tells the story of a young woman's struggle for independence, against law and society, which defined a married woman as her husband's property. Hence critics regarded it 'feminist in the deepest sense of the word', and 'the first manifesto for women's liberation'.

Helen Huntingdon, the heroine, leaves her atrocious and abusive husband for an independent existence. And, by doing so she defies the laws of the time and goes against the social conventions of the day. In 1848, the year of the novel's publication, the wife and children were under husband's control, and it was impossible to leave one's husband without causing legal problems and social scandal. Yet, Anne Brontë's heroine, failing to reform her husband, goes away taking her son with her. Thus, Arthur Huntingdon brings to light the typical concept about wives that despite all ill-treatment, the wife is expected to obey and entertain her husband without complaint. Helen therefore speaks about Arthur's notion of the duties of a husband and wife in the following words:
Arthur is not what is commonly called a bad man: he has good qualities; but he is a man of self-restraint or lofty aspirations — a lover of pleasure, given up to animal enjoyments: he is not a bad husband, but his notions of matrimonial duties and comforts are not my notions. Judging from appearances, his idea of a wife is a thing to love one devotedly and to stay at home — to wait upon her husband, and amuse him and minister to his comfort in every possible way, he chooses to stay with her; and, when he is absent, to attend to his interests, domestic or otherwise, and patiently wait his return; no matter how he may be occupied in the meantime. (192).

Arthur, a typical Victorian, represents the ideas and notions of the day. When Helen finds him flirting with the wife of his friend and asks: "Are the marriage vows a jest; and is it nothing to make it your sport to break them...?", he replies: "You are breaking your marriage vows yourself"; he continues:

You promised to honour and obey me, and now you attempt to hector over me, and threaten and accuse me and call me worse than a highwayman... I won't be dictated to by a woman, though she be my wife. (189).

Helen shows the injustice done to her, and asks him to imagine himself in her place: would he then remain cool and calm? The answer is rather deceptive: "The cases are different", and goes on to say, "It is a woman's nature to be constant — to love one and only one, blindly, tenderly, and for ever ..." (ibid). It is this unjust treatment that goads Helen to resent and seek independence.

Helen is, therefore, in a state of despair. Her case shows how Victorian girls take lightly the highly serious issue of marriage. They are not trained aptly to choose suitable partners. Helen is, in fact, warned by her aunt before Arthur's appearance in her life,
Now, I want to warn you, Helen, of these things, and to exhort you to be watchful and circumspect from the very commencement of your career, and not to suffer your heart to be stolen from you by the first foolish or unprincipled person that covets the possession of it... (110).

In spite of this warning, Helen is attracted by a drunkard husband who is disagreeable. She has the misconception that she will reform him after marriage. Things turn out to be worse after they live together.

Helen faces the situation by exercising her will-power. She patiently bears all pain and has the misconception that she will reform her husband. She mutters her thoughts thus:

how shall I get through the months or years of my future life in company with that man —my greatest enemy? For none could injure me as he has done. Oh! When I think how fondly, how foolishly I have loved him, how madly I trusted him, how constantly I have laboured, and studied, and prayed, and struggled for his advantage; and how cruelly he has trampled on my love, betrayed my trust, scorned my prayers and tears, and efforts for his preservation. (240).

She proposes for separation but Arthur refuses for: “...he was not going to be the talk of all the old gossip in the neighbourhood; he would not have it said that he was such a brute his wife could not live with him” (249).

When he, by chance, learns that she intends to go away with her son, he deprives her of all she possesses (i.e., money, jewellery, etc.). He thinks he is the real owner of everything. Yet, she manages to move on to Wildfell Hall and earns her own living.
Helen may still be regarded as a loyal wife to the end. She visits him when he is ill. During her stay in Wildfell Hall, she falls in love with Graham Markham, though she does not reveal her thoughts and feelings. After her husband’s death she marries Graham in spite of his poverty. Again, Helen defies the common notion of choosing a husband of high status.

This is true of the concept of marriage held by others in the novels. Like Mrs. Murray in *Agnes Grey*, Millicent Hargrave’s mother in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* wishes merely to have her daughter taken off her hands—"well married; that is, united to a rich partner", settled with a man of wealth and prestige. Though the girl is unwilling, the mother traps her and she is married. She is scared of marrying a man whose very thought frightens her. Later on, Millicent passively tolerates her husband’s abusive behaviour in a traditional and conventional feminine style unlike her friend, Helen. The latter never misses an opportunity to find fault with her husband, the former calmly accepts her misfortune. Her social position, marriage, and submissive quiet nature make her indulge in non-resistance as a kind of self-defense to hold her together. As she cannot escape she tells her friend, Helen, "Don’t say a word against Mr. Hattersely, for I want to think well of him... you must tell me, if you can, that he is better than he seems". When her younger sister, Esther, gets a chance to marry, Millicent appeals to Helen to prevent the girl not to marry for the sake of wealth and social position,

Well, since you have so much influence with her, I wish you would seriously impress it upon her, never, on any account, or for anybody’s persuasion, to
The marriage of Millicent and Hattersely provides a glimpse of unhappy marriage.

Another perspective of unsuccessful marriage in which a woman marries a man for the sake of wealth and not for love is that represented by Annabella. She is unaffected by marriage because she does not love her husband, and has married him for his money. She attracts gentlemen with her exceptional singing voice and flirts with them, regardless of their matrimonial status. This also throws light on the fact that men become attached to women on account of their beauty.

Anne Brontë also highlights the ill-treatment of children and their upbringing. In Agnes Grey, Tom Bloomfield is spoilt by elevating his position as a male member of the family. This seven-year-old boy has the freedom to tease innocent birds and animals, "Oh, pooh! I shan't. Papa knows how I treat them, and he never blames for it; he says it's just what he used to do when he was a boy." Rosalie Murray takes no care of her daughter because her husband disapproves of a female child and prefers a male one. She even predicts that the child will die and she does not want to be attached to her. Also, Arthur Huntingdon, in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, ill-treats his son. He considers him a useless idiot, who is insensible. The child is completely dependent and he criticises Helen who dotes on the child instead of her husband. He does not teach him moral values rather he misguides him and develops in him a feeling of hatred towards his mother.
Agnes, on the contrary, admires children; and Helen's only joy is her son for her life is darkened by her husband's presence, "... and thank Heaven, I am a mother too. God has sent me a soul to educate for heaven, and given me a new and calmer bliss, and stronger hopes to comfort me" (191-92).

Anne Brontë finds characters for her novels in real life. They are both good and bad. This variety bears testimony to the fact that they are not all similar.
CHAPTER 3

The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of George Eliot
The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of George Eliot

George Eliot, one of the most eminent Victorian novelists, analyses the feminist aspects, depicts female characters, and discusses the man-woman relationship and many other relevant aspects in order to highlight the concept of womanhood through her novels.

George Eliot, a well-known Victorian novelist, is also a modern writer in many respects. She is modern in the sense that she regarded the novel as a serious form of art and in her interest in the human psyche. She analyses the motives and mental processes which move her characters in a particular way. She also depicts the inner struggles of her characters and thus lays bare their souls before the reader.

George Eliot was the male pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans (later Marian), born in Warwickshire, England. She was the youngest daughter of her father, who greatly influenced her early life. She admired and respected him for making her the writer she was. She writes thus:

I considered him a parent so much to my honour that the mention of my relationship to him was likely to secure me regard among those to whom otherwise a stranger--my father's stories from his life included so many names of distant persons that my imagination placed no limit to his acquaintanceship.¹

Her father appears as Adam Bede in the novel of the same name, and as Caleb Garth in Middlemarch. Her mother, Leslie Stephen, George Eliot <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/stephen-geliot/geliot.htm> [May 25, 2002]
The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of George Eliot

Christiana Evans, a woman of solid country stock, was Evan's second wife. Unlike the father, Christiana was not favourable in her attitude towards her plain faced youngest daughter. She disliked her for she felt that Mary was responsible for her broken health. She favoured her son, Isaac, and was proud of her pretty, well-behaved elder daughter, Chrissy. Mary felt isolated and unhappy and she was confined to her world of imagination. Isaac was close to her, on whom she showered her love and affection. She was also quite close to her father who was proud of her sharp intellect and bragged of it. In her early years, she accompanied her father in his business tours and drives through the countryside. They shared their experiences together. She enjoyed the beauty of the countryside in these travels with her father, standing between his knees while he drove leisurely, and thus acquired knowledge about life in the countryside. She grew familiar with the neighbouring farms, the countryside and its folk, which were preserved, in her memory. These references occur frequently in her novels. In this regard Leslie Stephen writes thus: "The impression made upon the girl during these years is sufficiently manifest in the first series of her novels."² He adds that, in her childhood, Mary Ann was impressed by the sights and sounds of Nature and it makes her a great regional novelist.

Mary Ann grew and matured before the invention of steam engine and electric telegraphs. In her introduction to Felix Holt, she describes the world in which she lived to the following effect:

² Leslie Stephen, 3
...the glory had not yet departed from the old coach roads, the great road-side inns were still brilliant with well polished tankards, the smiling glances of pretty barmaids, and the repartees of jocose ostlers; the mail still announced itself by the merry notes of the horn.3

Her childhood marked by sensational feelings was spent in watching the passing of the two coaches, which ran between Birmingham and Stanford. She along with her brother watched this moving scene till coaches were replaced by railways.

Isaac was sent to school when Mary was five years old, who was also sent to a boarding school, kept by Miss Lathom at Attleboro, a village close by. But Ann could not continue her education because of the illness of her mother. She was held responsible for everything. Like Wordsworth's Lucy she was brought up in the lap of Nature. When Isaac returned from school, he spent the day riding a pony. Mary Ann was left alone and instead she turned to books. According to J.W. Cross (1885), she could get very few books and she read them again and again until she knew them by heart. She admired Aesop's Fables and later, like her heroine, Maggie Tulliver, she became fond of the History of Devil by Daniel Defoe. She also read The Vicar of Wakefield with pleasure as also Joe Miller's Jest Book, The Pilgrims' Progress and Rasselas.

Robert Evans, Mary Ann's father, saw the spark of intelligence in her and resolved to develop her hidden genius. He sent her to a better school kept by Miss

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Wallington at Nuneaton. Here, she met Miss Maria Lewis, the governess, who took interest in her. Miss Lewis, being an ardent Evangelist intensified young Mary Ann’s religious fervour. Hence, Cynthia Grenier (2003) writes about Ann thus:

Fortunately, Maria Lewis, an assistant governess at the school, took the ugly duckling under her wing. For it should be noted here that Mary Ann was not graced by nature. In her adult life, people regularly made cruel remarks about her appearance...Through Miss Lewis, who was Irish by birth, Mary Ann was also drawn to Evangelicalism.

Miss Lewis, being a sensitive person, felt that Ann required love and attention. Also she discovered her hidden intelligence. She therefore inculcated in her a love of literature.

Mary Ann’s parents did not condemn her deep attachment to religion. Miss Lewis, who recommended a diligent study of the scriptures, gave an opportunity to Ann to read the Bible repeatedly during her four-year stay at school.

At the age of thirteen, Mary Ann was sent to Miss Rebecca Franklin’s School. The broad Midland dialect that she had spoken all her life was replaced by a cultivated speech at this school. During her stay there she was admired by her friends for her musical voice. She received lessons in music, drawing, English History, French and arithmetic. Miss Rebecca made her translate some pages of Maria Edgeworth’s novels into French. She also read the

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The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of George Eliot

novels of this novelist, who was considered the first regional writer. Ann also read a number of English writers including Shakespeare, Milton, Young, Cowper and Byron. She also read the novels of Bulwer Lyton and Sir Walter Scott. She was, in fact, profoundly influenced by Scott, who first introduced her to the writing of fiction. She not only discovered through Scott the possibilities of fiction but his fundamentally Tory imagination also encouraged her in the use of dialect. This was essential for the portrayal of the life of rustics and peasants of the Midland.

As Christina Evans, Ann's mother, died her formal education came to an end. Her sister got married, and, therefore, Ann was left alone to take care of the house. She tried to replace her mother at home and to be a good asset to her father. In the evenings she would read to him the novels of Scott for he loved the author. Though she left school, her education continued for she read incessantly along with her other responsibilities. Her father arranged tutors for her to study German, Italian and music. Her religious zeal and interest in Evangelical religion governed her thought and feelings as are reflected in her novels.

Her Evangelical fervour was later replaced by Secular matters. She read the Romantics and took keen interest in Wordsworth, Byron, Shelly, Coleridge and Southey. Wordsworth was her favourite author. She was impressed by his philosophy and his attachment to the common man. This influence is traceable in George Eliot's novels.

In 1841, Robert Evans decided to retire in favour of his son, Isaac. He and Mary Ann shifted to a house called Bird Grove in Coventry. Here she came into contact with the
Brays and their friends. Bray influenced Mary Ann very deeply. Cynthia Grenier (2003) describes this new relationship thus: "Mary Ann found Bray immensely stimulating intellectually, and he responded eagerly to the young woman's keen questing mind." Bray's house, Rosehill, on the outskirts of the city, was a centre of local intellectual life and activity, and the novelist came to know intellectuals like Robert Owen and Ralph W. Emerson through Mr. Bray. She thus came into contact with many intellectuals of the time. Her beliefs were deeply shaken and she became a victim of doubts and conflicts for which Mr. Robert Evans blamed the Brays. And still she got some benefit from this contact with the Brays. When the new wife of Bray's brother-in-law was unable to work on a translation she had begun of David Friedrich Strauss' celebrated work Das Leben Jesu (The Life of Jesus), Mary Ann was asked to take over the task and she spent two years to complete the work.

Robert Evan's life came to an end in 1849 and the Brays took Ann with them on a tour of Europe. When they returned, she stayed behind in Switzerland. On her return to England, she found everything changed. She felt lonely and constantly visited the Brays, where she met John Chapman, a young publisher, who was about to buy the Westminster Review, a contemporary periodical. Chapman wanted to revive it through publishing articles written by eminent critics and writers. He was impressed by Mary Ann's sharp intelligence and asked her to join him as an assistant editor. She thus visited London frequently.

3 Cynthia Grenier, 2
Chapman was married but he had a governess-mistress named Miss Tilly. He had an affair with Marian. Both wife and mistress began to resent this love relation and managed to send her away. Joan Bennett (1962), in this regard, quotes Chapman’s words from his diary about the miserable state of Mary Ann:

M. departed today. I accompanied her to the railway. She was very sad, and hence made me feel so. She pressed me for some intimation of the state of my feelings. I told her that I loved E and S also, though each in a different way. At this avowal she burst into tears. I tried to comfort her and reminded her of the dear friends she was returning to, but the train whirled her away very very sad.6

This experience almost shattered her emotionally and yet she yearned to be a wife and mother. Bennett thought she would never get married. Chapman, however, felt that he needed her assistantship and urged her to return. She accepted the offer as a business deal and suppressed all her tender feelings of love. Ann thus got recognition for her intellectual powers. As one of the editors of Westminster Review she came into contact with eminent writers like Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle, Emerson, Harriet Martineau, Mrs. Gaskell, Forster and Louis Blanc. They all recognized her talent and she was never condemned.

Herbert Spencer, an important contributor to the Westminster Review, attracted by Mary Ann’s intellect became her close friend. Both of them had many things in common and Mary became emotionally attached to him but as he did not show any inclination to marry her they merely

remained good friends. Spencer introduced her to G. Henry Lewes, a contributor to the periodical. He was two years older to her and he came from a different background. When she met him he had acquired a good deal of fame in literature. He was also a literary critic, novelist and actor. He also had knowledge about European literature. His works included literary biographies, children's books and natural history. His personal life was rather unhappy. His wife, Agnes, was beautiful and talented. Lewes's friend, Thoronton Hunt, who was a frequent visitor to their house and with whom he freely exchanged views about love attracted the attention of Agnes. G. Lewes got shocked but overlooked his wife’s flexible nature and pretended to conceal his bitterness. He also could not divorce her according to the Victorian laws prevalent at that time.

George Lewes was extremely attractive and was popular amongst all. He was a good conversationalist, too. In appearance he was plainer than Mary Ann. Hence his handsome personality and sense of wit attracted Mary. He was also an admirer of her intellectual beauty. He offered her love and affection. He could respond to her emotional need. She was seriously inclined towards him and became his mistress. Ian Adam (1969), hence, comments on this relationship to the following effect: "..., in 1854, came the action which was to scandalize her society, cast her out from her family, and open her career as a novelist."^ Adam also adds that Lewes gave Mary Ann emotional security and intellectual stimulus she needed to blossom forth. Her

family and friends were wonder-struck and the two together enjoyed moments of pleasure they were seeking for. They left for Germany for a change in 1854, as Lewes was not well. During their stay in Berlin, Marian found a story she wrote a long time ago. She showed it to Lewes who admired her power of observation. Joan Bennett comments on it to the following effect: "the creative gift in her, which he did so much to discover and to foster, produced books of timeless value while his own voluminous works were in their very nature ephemeral."8 Further Lewes encouraged her to write a story, *The Sad Fortunes of Rev. Amos Barton*. The story was published under the pseudonym of George Eliot by Blackwood. J.W. Cross points out that since ‘George’ was Mr. Lewes’s Christian name and ‘Eliot’ was an easily pronounced name Ann chose this pen name; while Ian Adam writes, “She adopted the pseudonym George Eliot, partly to avoid the prejudice against women writers, and partly, one suspects, to shield herself from direct criticism to which she was always hypersensitive.”9

George Lewes’s admiration cast an influence on George Eliot and she turned into a novelist. It was through Lewes that she discovered her genius. He also saved her from harsh criticism of the men of letters. She therefore blossomed forth as a writer due to his abiding influence and love. She repaid for what he did for her by dedicating the manuscript of *Felix Holt* to him and by taking charge of his wife, Agnes, and his three daughters after his death.

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8 Joan Bennett, 47.
9 Ian Adam, 3
With Lewes's death on November 30, 1878, the literary career of George Eliot came to an end. It was a great setback to her literary career and she expressed her desolation and deprivation through letters. Later, George Eliot married a twenty years younger friend, J.W. Cross, an American banker, on May 6, 1880. They went to Italy and probably during their stay in Venice he died by jumping from the balcony of a hotel. She died of a kidney ailment the same year on December 22. In her will she expressed her wish to be buried in Westminster Abbey, but Dean Stanley of Westminster Abbey did not allow it and Eliot was buried in Highgate Cemetery.

The period of Eliot's literary career stretches from 1857, when her first collection of stories was published to 1876, the year of publication of her last novel *Daniel Deronda*. She wrote eight novels altogether, a verse-drama, one volume of poetry, and one of the critical essays. Her pen-name continued throughout her lifetime. Her novels fall into two groups, the first includes her early novels: *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and *Silas Marner* (1861) which evoke memories of Midland-life during her girlhood; while the second group includes her late novels: *Romola* (1863), *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), *Daniel Deronda* (1876), in which she takes new aspects of life; and *Middlemarch* (1872) in which she returns once again to her favourite Midlands.

Eliot's greatest landmark was her treatment of realism in her works. She brought perfection to the genre of psychological realism which was later on treated very well by the American novelist, Henry James. She brought Art
close to life, observed truths and coherently presented the psychological motives of characters. Dr. Karen A. Driosen, in an article on George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, writes thus:

Eliot’s novels are often compared to those of Leo Tolstoy: literary historians tend to regard her as among the most talented and influential Realist novelists in England. Literary critics typically distinguish Eliot’s fiction from that of her contemporaries by pointing to its effective integration of close psychological studies of her characters and intellectually rigorous philosophical arguments.¹⁰

It was indeed George Eliot who created characters with moral dilemmas, which are timeless.

Elaine Showalter, in her *Sexual Anarchy* (1990), traces the history of the reception of George Eliot’s work and her reception by women writers and critics. Showalter regards George Eliot a queen among Victorian novelists. As a literary figure, Showalter writes, Eliot was also a male by her pseudonym for she wrote with masculine authority and intellect. Eliot had a man’s brain and woman’s heart. Eliot’s death brought an end to the tradition of writers of both genders fighting for supremacy as new voices promoting a new form. Those who succeeded her had to evolve a typically new feminine style.

George Eliot was the target of criticism in all kind of ways. Some critics approved her fine sense of morality, her vivid characterization and her realism. Others disapproved her characterization and regarded her inferior to Jane Austen for she indulged in exaggeration. Some thought she imitated Jane Austen. But in fact Austen dealt with familiar

types, whereas Eliot laid bare extraordinary souls. The first portrayed characters found in polite circle but George Eliot depicted social rebels with ideas and ideals. In Eliot's novels both male and female protagonists yearn for perfection and rebel against the world around them. Despite certain similarities that are found between Jane Austen and George Eliot, Eliot was original in every respect. Comparing the two novelists, Philip V. Allingham (2001) writes thus:

Like Jane Austen, Eliot employs a series of social gatherings such as the young squire's twenty-first birthday festivities and the Poyser's harvest home in Adam Bede to inter-relate her characters and bring new characters on stage, as in Book One, Chapter Eleven, of Middlemarch. Unlike Austen, Eliot does not maintain the convention of presenting certain good characters ("true wits") with whom the reader is expected to identify in order to learn virtue (for example, Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice). Eliot does, however, utilize essay-like asides to offer her philosophical interpretations of life.  

Eliot probes deeply into the obscure recesses of human nature, and deals in a variety of ways with those spiritual conflicts and moral disorders which delineate human characters and show their fall from greatness. The tragedies are caused by some moral weakness, and Eliot shows how that moral weakness brings about inner disorder leading to utter ruin of the person concerned. Each individual is therefore a maker or destroyer of his destiny. And this is applicable to both male and female characters.

Eliot's art of characterization is remarkable. Hence she is regarded as conspicuous amongst typical Victorians. Like

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most contemporary female writers, Eliot drew upon her own experiences in the presentation of male and female characters. She was also exceptional in presenting very impressive male and female characters. Her characters grow and develop during the course of the novel. They are very dynamic characters, are warm and full of vitality, having human desires and weaknesses.

One fails to assess whether George Eliot presents conventional or unconventional female characters in her novels. Also critics do not agree if this nineteenth-century novelist is feminist or anti-feminist. Some critics place her in the category of a committed progressive, who is compassionate towards women and feels unhappy about their confinement. Also the critics point out that Eliot has created strong and rebellious women who oppose the dominant patriarchal culture. Eliot, in her novels, shows that patriarchy prevents women to fulfil their desires and aspirations. Hence they become helplessly dependent on men. Further the critics conclude that Eliot feels disheartened regarding her mission of feminism. Her women are fragile for none of the brilliant, aspirant, gifted, beautiful and philosophical female characters usurp male roles, demand the vote, petition for divorce, or verbalise the inequity of gender codes.

These views are rather prejudiced for Eliot’s works are critical regarding the dominant patriarchal culture. She counterbalances both patriarchy and feminism. Eliot makes the talented heroines in her novels fully dependent on men for she has a realist approach in this regard. Thus Eliot depicts the plight of women of her time. A critic, therefore,
points out that Eliot does not moralise about the rights of women but reminds one of the duties of women. Edith Simcox (1881), in an article about George Eliot, writes to the following effect:

She gave unqualified an unhesitating assent to what might be called the most 'advanced' opinions on this subject [i.e. the whole subject of the rights and position of women]; only the opinions had to be advocated in practice with large tolerance and disinterested, and she wished to be assured that nothing of what is valuable in the social order of the past should be sacrificed in the quest of even certain future good. In matters intellectual she had, what is perhaps equally rare in men and women, the same standard for both sexes.¹²

In most of her novels, George Eliot reflects on the ill-treatment of women and the painful consequences of the patriarchal system that denies women any right that they deserve; the problems relating to matters of love, marriage and education; the place of women in the Victorian age; the problem of self-negation on the part of young girls who are brilliant and aspire to achieve their objectives; the exploitation of poor young girls at the hands of upper class men, etc. Anne Wiese (2001), in an abstract of her 'Images of Women in George Eliot's Middlemarch, writes thus:

Throughout the Victorian era, women were regarded as ornamental and passive 'Angles in the House' with a natural responsibility for home and children. The ideal of the tender and submissive angel served as a powerful role model for middle-class and upper class women. It permeated all fields of art and public

discourse, and considerably influenced George Eliot's literary creation.\textsuperscript{13}

Hence Eliot's work challenges the conventional views regarding women's place in society.

The issue relating to gender conflict is clearly noticeable in the treatment of Eliot's female characters who represent the poignancy of unfulfilled potential and repressed desires in a world dominated by men who are supposed to be partners in life rather than masters. Women were expected to remain dependent on men and deal only with trivial matters. The female protagonists, from Maggie Tulliver to Dorothea Brooke, are victims of male domination and abide by this inferior position given to them. In \textit{Middlemarch} (1872), Eliot has defined in precise terms what men and women should do within society. The emphasis falls on women who are targets of attack. Dorothea Brooke, the heroine, a beautiful and intelligent girl, is goaded by ambitious designs in life. She is urged upon to adjust herself according to other people's ideas and also accept male leadership throughout. This highly ambitious young girl is, unfortunately, trapped by a number of men and falls a victim to her own submissiveness from the beginning and her potential remains dormant. The first to trap her is her uncle, Mr. Brooke, who constantly tries to belittle her and her class as "\textit{Young girls don't understand political economy}”, and he will not "\textit{let young ladies meddle with his documents}” as "\textit{young ladies are too flighty}” in his opinion. Even in matters relating to her marriage, Mr. Brooke does

not offer advice but rather reflects on the Victorian man's views on man-woman relationship by stating that marriage "is a noose, you know. Temper now. There is temper. And a husband likes to be master".

In the second phase of her life, Dorothea is herself responsible for being subjected to a man's control. She takes a wrong decision that leads to her suffering in later life. She chooses to marry a middle-aged scholar, Edward Casaubon, for she admires his intellectual beauty, but he does not come up to her expectations. Dorothea can be judged in two ways, her adolescent views on marriage and her hasty decisions:

Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the Parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects...Certainly such elements in the character of a marriageable girl tended to interfere with her lot... 14

It also reflects on the misconceptions of a husband and her views on marriage:

And how should Dorothea not marry? a girl so handsome and with such prospects? Nothing could hinder it but her love of extremes, and her insistence on regulating life according to notions which might cause a wary man to hesitate before he made an offer, or even might lead her at least to refuse all offers. A young lady of some birth and fortune, who knelt suddenly on a brick floor by the side of a sick labourer and prayed fervidly as if she thought herself living in the time of the Apostles...,15

15 George Eliot, 7
Dorothea may also be viewed in terms of self-sacrifice. She degrades herself and her intelligence and decides to stand by her future husband to enable him acquire intellectual success. She is highly impressed by the scholarship and learning of Casaubon and confesses: "what a lake compared with my little pool". She hopes to inculcate his knowledge and experience. Casaubon turns out to be dismal, selfish and domineering. He seeks her assistance but retains his impulse to control the opposite sex, a typical model of patriarchy.

Thus, George Eliot throws light on the effects of wrong choice and the disinterestedness of young girls in highly serious matters of marriage. The mothers play an ignoble role in this regard who do not give suitable guidance to their daughters. Ken Thompson (2001) comments on the ill-effects of fatal marriages in Eliot's *Middlemarch* and writes thus:

In the absence of the female perspective on the topic of marriage, Dorothea and Celia are still orphans to the selection process of good husbands... Dorothea was in need of "the bridle" of motherhood, sadly lacking on Mr. Brooke's estate.16

Thompson further points out that the non-existence of a mother in Dorothea's life resulted in the selection of an undesirable husband. Ken Thompson is of the opinion that had she demanded her rights and privileges in a proper way her husband would have known the relevance of mutual cooperation in married life. Instead, Eliot's character, Miss

Broke, has no regard for the narrator's advice "A woman dictated before marriage in order that she may have an appetite for submission afterwards". Marcus Wichik (1997) also expresses the same views:

It is not love that attracts Dorothea to the corpse-like Casaubon, rather her sense of duty; her desire to be like one of Milton's daughters. Dorothea, orphaned at a young age, would seem to long for a husband who can fill the role of the father she lost.17

In her final novel entitled Daniel Deronda, George Eliot reflects on the theme of gender. It brings to light the effects of unsuitable marriages and the sufferings of women in this regard. Gwendolen, the female protagonist, is beautiful, proud, ambitious and strong. The critics consider her a symbol of ideal womanhood. She is presented as a woman possessed with excessive desires that lead to her suffering. Patricia Vigderman (1998) compares Gwendolen to Dorothea Brooke in the following words:

Like Dorothea, she has a vague sense that she could have a life larger than anything she's seen at home, but lacking Dorothea's ardent temperament, she simply "meant to do what was pleasant to herself in a striking manner; or rather, whatever she could do so as to strike others with admiration and get in that reflected way a more ardent sense of living, seemed pleasant to her fancy."18

Though strong she is prejudiced towards men, "I shall never love anybody, I can't love people. I hate them". Gwendolen

marries Grandcourt who turns out to be a brute who wants to lead a woman by the nose:

“She had been brought to accept him in spite of every thing--brought to kneel down like a horse under training of the arena, though she might have an objection to it all the while. On the whole, Grandcourt got more pleasure out of this notion” (28: 269-70).

Further he “meant to be master of a woman who would have liked to master him” (28: 270).

In Victorian age, women held a position no better than animals that were subservient to their masters. Gwendolen’s ulterior motive with regard to marriage, unlike that of Dorothea’s, is money and position, and Grandcourt is a man of wealth and rank. She visualized a comfortable life for her mother and three younger sisters. Though one pities her for sacrificing her youth, ambition and even womanhood for the sake of her family, yet one cannot overlook her seduction of money. It is at the end she realizes that “he had won her by the rank and luxuries he had to give her; he had fulfilled his side of the contract...the husband to whom she felt that she sold herself...” (54: 573). The truth is revealed when Gwendolen learns that Grandcourt had four children by Lydia Glasher, whose story resembles that of Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede and Molly Farren in Silas Marner, all being representatives of female exploitation or rather victims of aristocracy. Patricia Vigderman disapproves the meeting between Gwendolen and Lydia to the following effect:

More terrifying in this encounter than what she has just learned about Grandcourt is the implied female powerlessness she shares with this unhappy woman:
"It was as if some ghastly vision has come to her in a
dream and said, 'I am a woman's life.'" 19
The woman seeks refuge from an oppressive husband not by
standing on her own feet but directing her attention towards
Daniel Deronda. The same is true of Mirah, Daniel's wife,
who fell in love with Daniel and married him to escape from
a tyrannical father.

In *Romola*, which describes fifteenth-Century Florence,
George Eliot deals very well with the issue of gender and
provides another stance of patriarchy, and asserts the fact
that she is feminist. Romola, the heroine, is a victim of male
oppression due to no other reason but the simple fact that,
like Dorothea and Gwendolen, she is a woman and her sex
is the object of oppression in the hands of her most beloved
ones, her ungrateful father and a deceitful husband.

Romola is the devoted daughter of her father, Bardo,
and resigns her will to his wishes. Bardo is shown as a
"moneyless blind old scholar", who dreams of making his
daughter a source of income to bear the expenses of his
library and hence he pays especial attention to her studies.
Romola patiently endures his ceaseless demands as he
grows older. Yet Bardo, a typical patriarch, wishes his son,
Dino, who has left his ancestral home to become a friar.
Unlike her brother, Romola takes charge of her father
forever. Though she is more inclined to studies than her
brother the father fails to admire her. Also he is rather
prejudiced towards her and does not approve her talents.
According to him, her deficiencies as a scholar spring from
her "feminine mind", and her strength is her "man's nobility

19 Patricia Vigerman, 9
of soul”. Romola good-humourdly accepts all criticism and remains faithful to the end.

Romola goes from the tyrannical father’s guardianship to the protection of an arrogant and deceitful husband, named Tito. She tries to adjust for a short while but when she learns that Tito sold her father’s library for his personal monetary gains, she turns rebellious. She resolves to give up the marriage contract and leave the man. In this regard, Romola resembles Anne Bronte’s heroine of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Helen Huntingdon. She follows the advice of Savonarola, who convinces her to stay with her husband. Thus she uses “all the energy of her will into renunciation”. She, later, learns that Tito had abandoned his step-father; and had two children from a mistress, whom he had lured into a relationship followed by a fake marriage ceremony. Romola is in a state of conflict whether to give up her husband or not. She is torn between the demands of “an outward law which she recognized as widely-ramifying obligation”, and her moral sense to do the right thing. She, further, seeks refuge in the person of Savonarola, who disappoints her. She, eventually, decides to end her life and sails in a boat “with a great sob...that she might be gliding into death”, but she wakes up to find herself in the surroundings of the “speckless sapphire-blue of the Mediterranean”.

Most women in George Eliot’s novels fail to escape from their crucial fate imposed on them by a patriarchal society which grants complete authority to men who tend to dominate women. They play the role of oppressors in the guise of a father, husband, brother and son. This gender
conflict and its ill consequences are shown in George Eliot's characters who represent life in all its shades. The discussion of gender-based problems that Victorian women faced is also reflected in the story of Maggie Tulliver, the heroine of *The Mill on the Floss*, who is a true representative of George Eliot. Maggie Tulliver is beautiful, precocious, and intelligent but, unfortunately, her virtues got no recognition. Like her creator, Maggie is also passionate and sensitive. She suffers from early childhood. Maggie was always ridiculed by her parents and brother if she showed any inclination to make inquiries about things.

Despite her spark of intelligence, Maggie was deprived from the facilities of acquiring education for women were thought inferior in this regard. Tom, though less intelligent than Maggie, believes that because she is a girl, she is "too silly" to learn Latin. He, no doubt, represents the patriarchal system in its injustice shown towards women. Tom shared the common belief that women should be confined to their homes and should not be allowed to acquire education. And, in this regard, Maggie faces the same problem as Dorothea, Gwendolen, Romola, and Rosamond do.

Maggie Tulliver, moreover, has to stick to certain social norms and ideals, especially relating to romance and marriage. She belongs to a world where in gender conflict men prevail and women are given an inferior position. Maggie, who is rebellious by nature, will not accept submission to any confinement. Reacting against the limitations imposed upon her by her family, she decides to lead a life of deprivation and penance; she also has a cordial
relationship with Philip Wakem against her father’s wishes. It is Tom, again, who reminds her of the “duty” to her father.

Later on, she engages herself in a sensuous relationship with Stephen Guest, her cousin’s handsome suitor. Further, she has to choose between a life of passionate love with Stephen and her “duty” to her family and position; and she chooses the latter. This does not prove beneficial forever and George Eliot, unexpectedly, unites her with her oppressor, Tom, “There was no choice of courses, no room for hesitation, and she flooded into the current”.

George Eliot thus shows her readers that, in nineteenth-Century England, even those who claim themselves to be radical believe that women are inferior to men. In Felix Holt, The Radical, Harold Transome, the lord of the Transome Estate, comes back home with some radical views and intends to change the lot of the entire country, except that of women. Harold also believes that women are silly creatures who do not have any ability, nor right to discuss what he considers “men’s work”, such as politics and running estates. This, in fact, is the real lot of women in a male-dominated society. The first thing Harold does after his return is to declare his mother an “invalid” and to choose to run the estate himself despite the fact that Mrs. Transome did the job well in his absence. The same happens with Mrs. Holt, whose son, Felix, does not allow her to sell her homemade remedies for illnesses though she has no one to depend on when he is thrown into prison. In
The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of George Eliot

In Eliot's works, social problems and gender conflict are taken up together. From a Marxist's point of view, George Eliot is a realist novelist to the core. Unlike most of her contemporary writers, Eliot does not concern herself with the external conflict relating to individuals of the same community (i.e. the rich and the poor); rather she depicts the inner conflict within the character concerned, which is caused due to his/her social position (class) and the consequences that follow this conflict. This is evident in her treatment of some female characters who suffer and struggle on account of their inferior position in society. It is very well illustrated through the character of Rosamond Vincy, who, though young and beautiful and approved by all in Middlemarch, is yet dissatisfied with her present status and wishes to find a man who would help her to get rid of the bitter life led in a middle class society. She is particularly aware of her social standing and feels that "she might have been happier if she had not been the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer. She disliked anything which reminded her that her mother's father had been an inn-keeper." This spoils her marital life. Instead of admiring her husband's busy life-style and making his life pleasant, Rosamond is involved in trivial activities like selecting good furniture for their house and expressing a desire to go to London and imitate the current fashions prevalent there. It leads to utter disillusionment. She does not act according to the expectations of her husband, Lydgate. She is very selfish and thinks only of her requirements. In his absence
she borrows money for her unnecessary expenditure while her husband is already in debt. Even during the period of professional turmoil and financial strain Lydgate feels that Rosamond is remaining "utterly aloof from him". Instead of being cooperative, Rosamond proves to be a deceptive person. She thinks in terms of her own selfish ends, cares for public opinion and her status in society, and ignores her husband altogether.

Hetty Sorrel, in *Adam Bede*, is yet another example of a woman who is responsible for her utter failure in life due to her rebellious nature and lack of far-sightedness. Hetty, whose beauty is "like that of kittens, or very small downy ducks making gentle rippling noises with their soft bills, or babies just beginning to toddle and to engage in conscious mischief" is conscious of her physical charm that attracts several men like Luke Briton, Mr. Craig and also Adam Bede, whom her uncle considers the best suitor for her. Though an orphan and also poor, she is constantly day-dreaming and remains in a state of disillusionment. Though Adam is the best suitor for her, she does not wish to marry him for he is poor enough to afford the luxuries she dreams about. She thus feels inclined towards Arthur Donnithorne, the heir to the local estate, who can, according to her, satisfy all her desires, "to sit in a carpeted parlour and always wear white stockings, to have some large, beautiful ear-rings, to have Nottingham lace round the top of her gown and something to make her handkerchief smell nice". But as Eliot puts it, "young souls, in such pleasant delirium as hers, are as unsympathetic as butterflies sipping nectar". It is this wayward attitude towards life that leads Hetty to give way to
the seduction of young Arthur, who runs away, leaving her pregnant and in a state of despair. She therefore decides to leave Loamshire in order to look for him. On her way, she gives birth to a child, whom she abandons to die. She is, therefore, arrested and put into prison.

Eliot also describes the exploitation of poor women at the hands of upper-middle class or upper-class men. Hetty Sorrel, Molly Farren, Lydia Glasher and many others have been presented as victims of such ill-treatment.

In addition to the above-mentioned female characters, Eliot has also portrayed some rare and unforgettable pictures of gifted women like Mrs. Poyser, Daniah Morries, Celia Brooke, Mrs. Grath, Eppie, and many more. This variety shows Eliot's unique conception of women and her realistic presentation of them in her novels. To support this argument one may quote Leslie Stephen, who writes to the following effect:

I must repeat that George Eliot was intensely feminine, though more philosophical than most women. She shows it to the best purpose in the subtlety and the charm of her portraits of women, unrivalled in some ways by any writer of either sex; and shows it also, as I think, in a true perception of the more feminine aspects of her male characters. Still, sometimes she illustrates the weakness of the feminine view.20

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CHAPTER 4

The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of W. M. Thackeray
The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of William Makepeace Thackeray

This chapter throws light on the concept of womanhood from a man's point of view. Thackeray is one of the most celebrated writers of the nineteenth-century. Robert Fletcher, in his essay, entitled "William Makepeace Thackeray: A Brief Biography", writes about Thackeray to the following effect:

Thackeray was given the "education of a gentleman" at private boarding schools (so called "public schools"), including six years at Charter house, and the canings and other abuses he suffered in these institutions became the basis for remembrances in essays, such as The Roundabout Papers, as well as episodes in novels (Vanity Fair and The Newcomes), again, offer important examples.¹

While at school William was fond of sketching and reading novels. He was also a caricaturist. He was familiar with French culture and politics. He started his career as a Newspaper and magazine reviewer for many periodicals. Thus he became known in the literary world.

Thackeray earned fame with the publication of Vanity Fair in 1846. Besides miscellaneous writings he became conspicuous in the field of fiction. He also wrote Pendennis in 1850. In 1852, he published The History of Henry Esmond, which was followed by the publication of The Newcomes. And finally, in 1857-59, Thackeray published The Virginians, as a sequel to Henry Esmond. These novels brought him fame and recognition. Thackeray's private life, however, was miserable and tragic.

¹ Robert Fletcher, 'William Makepeace Thackeray: A Brief Biography' <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/wmt/wmtbio.html> [7 March 2004].
As opposed to Romanticism, Thackeray was more inclined towards realism and was therefore true to life both in style and characterization. In his novels, Thackeray presents a world that is real and familiar to the reader. Donald D. Stone, in a review of Thackeray's *The Newcomes*, quotes Edward Burne-Jones's assessment of this novel, of which he writes: "a wonderfully faithful picture of the great world as it passes daily before us, many-sided, deeply intricate."²

Thackeray's contribution to English fiction was that he brought back sober actuality and solid realism to it. Charles Dickens, also a realist, does not excel in realism like Thackeray. According to Robert Fletcher, again, Thackeray surpasses Dickens due to his critical intellectual quality and his closeness to life and society.

Though most of the nineteenth-century novelists were followers of Henry Fielding yet Thackeray's realism is finer both in spirit and manner. In most of his novels, Thackeray depicts the life and manners of the upper-middle class English society. As Thackeray succeeded in establishing the realistic tradition in English fiction, he was regarded as nineteenth-century Fielding. In *Pendennis*, Thackeray's indebtedness to Fielding, the master of realistic fiction in English Literature, is evident. He confessed the truth that in *Tom Jones*, Fielding depicted the concept of a perfect man through the character of the hero. No one else could excel him in this regard. The hero also shares human weaknesses and therefore the portrayal of the hero is realistic.

Thackeray could not portray a complete man as Fielding's Tom Jones, but he also has his contribution in that art of character delineation. Thackeray's deep knowledge about human psychology and his awareness about all sorts of men made him excel in the art of characterization. Gordon N. Ray (1977) comments on Thackeray's realistic presentation of life and characters to the following effect:

> It was his endeavor he said in a rare statement of purpose, "to work as an artist telling the truth and morbidly perhaps eschewing humbug."

He further writes:

> Telling the truth to Thackeray meant describing life as he has seen it during the bitter years since he came of age. "He was created", he told Dr. John Brown, "with a sense of the ugly, the odd, of the meanly false, of the desperately wicked; he laid them bare; them under all disguises he hunted to death."

Thackeray also depicted the seamy side of life relating to men and women in his novels. He believed that the novelist should reveal with great truth the inner soul and character of both his male and female characters. This in his art and also realism enabled him to acquire a prominent place among the novelists of his age. Gordon N. Ray (1977), quotes Charlotte Brontë's views about Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* thus:

> There is a man in our days whose words are not framed for delicate ears; who to my thinking, comes before the great ones of society, much as the son of Imlah came before the throned Kings of Judah and Israel; and who speaks truth as deep, with a power as prophet like and as vital...I see in him an intellect

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4 ibid.
profounder and more unique than his contemporaries have yet recognized, because I regard him as the first social regenerator of the day—as the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped system of things.5

Thackeray’s art of writing and realism is unrivalled. Saintsbury, comparing him with the Victorian novelists, writes: “Thackeray is placed in another tradition, with his roots in the eighteenth century”, a statement upon which C.O. Gorman comments in the following way: “...Thackeray’s mixture of domestic incident and drama (exemplified in Vanity Fair) strikes Saintsbury as the chief element of yet another generic strand of Victorian fiction”.6

The world that Thackeray portrays in his novels is peculiarly Victorian. His works also reflect upon the customs and concerns of the Victorian age.

Thackeray’s cynicism is also revealed through the characters whose weaknesses are exposed by him. In Vanity Fair, for instance, the characters are worthless or weak and absurd, so that the impression of human life formed is that of hopeless chaos, of selfishness, hypocrisy, and futility. Yet, Thackeray does not condemn his characters. He often mocks at them, but he is also sensitive about them. Being a realist, if not a moralist, he aims at drawing attention to their faults. He highlights the relevance of courage, honesty, kindness, and selflessness in human life.

Early nineteenth-century England was marked by great snobbishness in all spheres of life. The sense of superiority found in Thackeray’s contemporaries also made

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5 Ian Watt (ed.), 256-257.
them ambitious. There was so much of jockeying for social position that Thackeray could not help satirizing it in his novels. He exposed the vice of people and condemned snobbishness in all its forms. In his novels, the characters appear to be very conscious about their status.

Human life, in Thackeray's view, is both virtuous and vicious. The men and women who inhabit this world are guilty of weaknesses. There are very few virtuous men and women in this world. These apostles of goodness are not like the heroic beings as Major Dubbin, Col. Newcome and Henry Esmond seem to imply. The good women are rather dull and weak-minded like Amelia Sedley and Helen Pendennis. The most dazzling of Thackeray's female characters, Becky Sharp and Beatrix Esmond, are ambitious women determined to get on in the world and thoroughly heartless and selfish. It is on account of it that he is regarded a cynic.

Besides realism, Thackeray achieved distinction in character-creation. His characters appear to be life-like. Unlike his contemporaries, Thackeray deviated from the concept of the hero. His characters, both male and female, have their own faults and weaknesses unlike the conventional hero who is perfect. This led Thackeray to entitle his first novel, *Vanity Fair*, 'A Novel Without A Hero'. Both titles very well describe the world of his novel and the others as well. It is so because in this novel he reveals the vanities of his times.

The above-mentioned facts reflect upon the art of the novelist. The various themes dealt with by the writer in his novels are also brought to light. One can therefore know
Thackeray's concept of womanhood; his portrayal of female figures; their relationships with their male counterparts; their position in society within its various domains.

Thackeray's novels are concerned with the problem of the position of women in society in relation to men. He was very well aware of the plight of women and their miserable condition in Victorian society. Also he knew the superior rank in which men were placed; while women were confined to their homes. This awareness was possible on account of his keen sense of observation and his sensitiveness about the problems raised by sponsors of the feminist movement in 1848.

Thackeray, in fact, knew of the suffering, subjection, and victimization of women at the hands of their tormenting partners. He therefore repeatedly highlighted their miseries in a variety of ways in his novels. He has also presented weak and dependent female characters to show their deplorable condition. Even intelligent, outrageous and courageous female characters, like Becky Sharp, are selfish, snobbish, and hence prove to be powerful and rebellious women. It is true that Becky's class and social position determine her personality as well as her fate, but many of her contemporaries; like Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, Caroline Hellstone, Villette, Frances Henrie, and Anne Bronte's Agnes Grey were worse than her as far as their social position is concerned. Yet, all of them lead a virtuous, independent life.

From a feminist perspective, Thackeray is regarded as an advocate of the women of his age. The themes he dealt with in his novels are related to the problems of women in
all domains of social life. In *Vanity Fair*, the narrator comments on Amelia Sedley, who is blaming herself for her selfishness in not letting her son, Georgy, go to his grandfather and thereby denying him education pleasures and luxuries of life in the following words:

> I know few things more affecting than that timorous debasement and self-humiliation of a woman. How she owns that it is she and not the man who is guilty, how she takes all the faults on her side; ...how she courts in a manner punishment for the wrongs which she has not committed and persists in shielding the real culprit. It is those who injure women who get the most kindness for them—they are born timid and tyrants and maltreat those who are humblest before them (50, 557).

The use of pronouns in this passage shifting from 'she' and 'her' to 'they' and 'them' shows how Thackeray while commenting on a particular situation and a particular woman is referring to women in general. He is also truthful in his comment as Amelia, who is weak by nature, is blaming herself though she is innocent. The grandfather, Osborne, opposed George to marry Amelia and disowned him for Sedley's social position is no longer the same.

Amelia is aware that her husband, George, is selfish, shallow, and superficial and does not pay heed to her. Yet, she remains loyal to him during his life-time and even afterwards. She quietly suffers his negligence and selfishness. The narrator comments on her weak position thus:

> Her heart tried to persist in asserting that George Osborne was worthy and faithful to her, though she knew otherwise. How many a thing had she said, and got nor echo from him. How many suspicious of selfishness and indifference had she to encounter and obstinately overcome. To whom could the poor little martyr tell these daily struggles and tortures.
Her hero himself only half understood her. She did not dare to own that the man she loved was her inferior, or to feel that she had given her heart away so soon. Given once, the pure bashful maiden was too modest, too trustful, too weak, too much woman to recall it. (18: 191-92)

Thackeray pities women, whose miseries are confined to domestic life whereas men enjoy freedom outside. He expresses his attitude towards the Victorian construct of gender roles and the male-female relationship in the following way:

We are Turks with the affection of our women; and have made them subscribe to our doctrine too. We let their bodies go abroad liberally enough, with smiles and ringlets and pink bonnets to disguise them instead of veils and yakmaks. But their souls must be seen by only one man, and they obey not unwillingly, and consent to remain at home as our slaves—ministering to us and doing drudgery for us (18, 192).

The narrator comments on matters relating to women and their sufferings in situations in which Amelia Sedley is placed. Hence, Amelia is a representation of the good woman, unlike Becky Sharp, and is a weak, simple and real sufferer. When she gives her child to his grandfather and accepts money from Osborne in return, the narrator comments on her lack of courage and misery thus:

O you poor secret martyrs and victims, whose life is a torture, who are stretched on racks in your bedrooms, and who lay your heads down on the block daily at the drawing-room table; every man who watches your pains, or peers in to the dark places where the torture is administered to you, must pity you—and—and thank God that he has a beard...if you properly tyrannize over a woman, you will find a h’p’orth of kindness act upon her and bring tears into her eyes, as though you were an angel benefiting her (57: 638-39).
Women's problems and concerns attracted the attention of Thackeray. In *The Newcomes*, the leading thread of the story of this novel is Clive Newcome's love for his cousin, Ethel. Their story is so meandering that any kind of an epitome of it will be difficult to make. Though Ethel belongs to a wealthy family, she is destined to suffer and becomes a victim both of patriarchy and greed, love for money and social position. Ethel, like many others of her kind, is destined for a better match by her grandmother; the countess of Kew, a worldly-wise woman and a symbol of patriarchy. Clive, a frustrated person, condemns and bemoans the state of women and attacks the patriarchal forces that suppress women and do not give them the right to choose freely in matters of love: "for our women, who are free, why should they rebel against Nature, shut their hearts, sell their lives, for rank and money, and forgo the most precious right of their liberty?" This is an expression of Thackeray's sentiment about women's position in Victorian society which is basically patriarchal. One can notice the sarcastic tone of the passage and Thackeray's criticism of the dominating laws, including those of Nature, that prevent women from indulging in freedom of choice. Thackeray reflects both on the gender problem and class conflict.

Thackeray's world is the same in almost all his novels. It is a world of vanity, hypocrisy, snobbishness, selfishness, and greed. There is oppression and domination in which human passion and love are curbed. It is wealth and social position, about which many of the characters care and are crazy about it. Women, according to Thackeray, have no value in this patriarchal society. They are no better than
The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of William Makepeace Thackeray

slaves. Thackeray protests against the painful condition of women through Ethel Newcome, who is a sarcastic, passionate and wise woman. She tells her grandmother, Lady Kew: "We are sold,...we are as much sold as Turkish women; the difference being that our masters may have but one Circassian at a time. No, there is no freedom for us. I wear my green ticket, and wait till my master comes." This is the reality that neither Ethel nor any other Victorian woman can escape. Donald D. Stone, in his review, comments on the power of the novel, the Newcomes, to the following effect:

Thackeray’s novel minutely and devastatingly invokes the world of the 1850s, with its enterprising spirit, its mean spiritedness, its worship of ego and of success at any price. In other words, the book is about any period of time, including our own, in which a scoundrel like Barnes Newcome can rise to business and political prominence on the strength of self-love and image making.  

According to Donald Stone, the world that Thackeray depicts is one in which the spirit of commerce infects everything: marriage, politics, art, even religion. This statement is applicable to Thackeray’s novels, because it is, in essence, the world of Vanity Fair. Thackeray draws a painful picture relating to the oppression of women in the Victorian society. He also shows how a woman is victimized both by her oppressor and the entire society. In this vividly-drawn portrayal, Thackeray narrates the story of Barnes Newcome, who, according to the narrator, is capable of giving a public lecture on 'The Poetry of Womanhood', while he himself beats his wife, Clara Newcome. Clara, a product

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7 Donald D. Stone, p.3
of this oppressive society, sells herself in the marriage market and then becomes a victim of her wrong choice. This patriarchal society does not allow her to raise voice against injustice for she is expected to bear everything without any protestation. When Clara flees from her oppressor, the jury of 'respectable men' stands by and sympathises with the husband, "Let us console the martyr...with thumping damages; and as for the woman...the guilty wretch!...let us lead her out and stone her." This story depicts Thackeray's concern about women of his times. Dan Callahan (2003), in a review of *Vanity Fair*, states that:

> Thackeray has little use of the men--his subject is women, and his general comments about them take up many pages of the text. There is a lot of pandering as far as this goes. You can tell exactly whom he thinks his audience is: roughly 60% women, 40% men. Every time he launches into one of his treatises on the fair sex, he is torn between feeding men's prejudices, flattering women's vanity, putting women in their place, and, only occasionally perhaps, airing his own feelings.8

Thackeray has rightly criticized the Victorians as far as the male-female relationship is concerned.

In *Vanity Fair*, the author depicts the materialistic concern of the social set-up. It makes people snobbish and careless for ethical values. In the novel there is class consciousness shown in a variety of ways and one is judged according to one's social status. Becky Sharp, for instance, is a gifted person and yet, at Pinkerton's School, is looked down upon and humiliated by other girls and the headmistress, Miss Pinkerton, on account of her inferior status. She tells Amelia Sedley, her close friend, about her

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unhappy experiences at school: "For two years I have only had insults and outrage from her. I have been treated worse than any servant in the kitchen. I have never had a friend or a kind word, except from you." (2, 23). She hates the unjust rules of society where the girls from affluent families are given preference: "what airs, that girl gives herself; because she is an Earl’s grand-daughter!", she said of one; "How they cringe and bow to that Creole, because of her hundred thousand pounds! I am a thousand times cleverer and more charming than that creature, for all her wealth" (2, 27). Miss Pinkerton also shows partiality to girls, who are well-off; and she feels delighted to get rid of Becky and does not give her a copy of Dr. Johnson’s Dictionary, which is presented to every student.

Though she acts as a governess of Sir Pitt Crawley’s two daughters, Becky feels that this is not the real goal that she aspires to achieve. The years of humiliation filled her with the determination to become a respectable woman and take revenge from society. She firmly believes that to succeed in her mission, she should be rich and for that she must marry a rich man. As she is quite attractive she hopes to succeed in her mission. During her stay with Amelia, before she joins the Crawleyes, Becky spots a prospective victim in Jos Sedley, Amelia’s brother. She is wise enough to flatter the boy and entrap him. Though she succeeds in this regard yet has to leave for she is disliked by George Osbourne, who conspires against her for he dislikes the idea of having a governess for a sister-in-law,

Osbourne pursued his advantage pitiless. He thought Jos a milksop. He had been revolving in his mind the marriage-question pending between Jos and Rebecca, and was not over well pleased that a member of a
family into which he, George Osbourne, of the -th, was going to marry, should make a *mésalliance* with a little nobody—a little upstart governess (6, 72).

It highlights the indifference of high-class people towards lower classes and especially a governess who was given no place in Victorian society. Yet, Becky Sharp is never bogged down by failure, which enables her to bounce back with more intensity and determination. Regarding this quality in Becky's character, Dan Callahan, in his review of *Vanity Fair*, writes to the following effect:

Becky is in many ways a female Julien Sorel. Unlike the protagonist of Stendhal's *The Red and The Black*, however, she is not 100% calculating. She is blunter than Julien, bolder; she makes mistakes. If her plans fail, as they often do, she usually laughs and moves on. "Where there's life there's hope”, she announces, after a particularly bad blunder. She ascends the social ladder slowly, but she does reach the top.9

In fact, Becky uses all the possible methods to achieve her ends. Moreover, she disregards virtue and indulges in deception and hypocrisy, because this is the way of the world. She feels that she should be challenging to gain a place and respect in high society. Her concept of being a gentleman’s wife is based on external aids, such as wealth and socially acceptable behaviour without which she cannot hope to succeed. “*It isn’t difficult to be a country gentleman’s wife*”, Rebecca thought

I think I could be a good woman if I had five thousand a year. I could dawdle about in the nursery and count the apricots on the wall. I could water plants in a greenhouse and pick off dead leaves from the geraniums. I could ask old women about their rheumatisms and order half-a-crown’s worth of soup for the poor. I shouldn’t miss it much, out of five

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9 Dan Callahan, p.1-2.
thousand a year. I could even drive out ten miles to
dine at a neighbour's, and dress in the fashions of
the year before last..., if I had but the money...(41:
471-72).

Becky is a strong woman and possesses an
overwhelming personality which enables her to dominate
and captivate all those who come into contact with her.
Disappointment and embarrassment never find a place in
her heart. Failing to gain Jos Sedley as a husband, she
immediately finds ways to please Sir Pitt Crawley, and then
his son, Rawdon, whom she marries secretly. She realises
her fault when proposed by Sir Pitt, "Married! Married!
Becky said, in an agony of tears-her voice choking with
emotion, her handkerchief up to her ready eyes, fainting
against the mantelpiece-a figure of woe fit to melt the most
abdurate heart" (15:162-63). She, nevertheless, accepts the
inevitable and determines to pursue her mission towards
achieving her ultimate goal.

As a wife, Becky Sharp is equally domineering and
selfish. Being clever and intelligent, she gains full control
over her husband. In this regard, Becky frankly tells
Rawdon, after losing the hope of inheriting his aunt, Miss
Crawley,

You can't shoot me into society', Rebecca said good-
naturally, "Remember, my dear, that I was but a
governess, and you, you poor silly old man, have the
worst reputation for debt, and dice, and all sorts of
wickedness. We shall get quite as many friends as we
want by-and-by, and in the meanwhile you must be a
good boy, and obey your schoolmistress in everything
she tells you to do (37: 417).

His low financial status enables her to dominate him. He
becomes submissive and never comments or protests. When
they are in Brussels, she flirts with George Osbourne, her enemy, for she aims at taking revenge from him, but she is also ruining the married life of her sincere friend, Amelia, to whom she should feel grateful. Yet, Rawdon does not object to George’s frequent visits, for the couple understands each other well; while Becky attracts George, Rawdon will win money from him at cards.

When Rawdon is in trouble, such as being overwhelmed by the creditors, it is Becky who assists him. The narrator describes Rawdon’s estimate of his wife and her ability in dealing with creditors to the following effect:

“Rawdon, with roars of laughter, related a dozen amusing anecdotes of his duns, and Rebecca’s adroit treatment of them. He avowed with a great oath, that there was no woman in Europe who could talk a creditor over as she could” (22, 241).

The narrator continues to describe their married life which is based on nothing but debts, “Almost immediately after their marriage, her practice had begun, and her husband found the immense value of such a wife. They had credit in plenty, but they had bills also in abundance, and laboured under a scarcity of ready-money” (ibid).

She succeeds almost in all her missions; making friends, getting debts, manipulating the creditors; exploiting those who are charmed and attracted by her, such as the wealthiest lover Lord Steyne; and achieving a place in the high society by being presented to the King himself.

Becky Sharp is presented as a low characterized woman for she does not love sincerely. She is a complete failure both as a wife and a mother. When most women are concerned about their husbands fighting in the battlefield,
at Waterloo, Becky is engaged in making alternate arrangements in case Rawdon dies. Also when he is arrested and put into prison, she does not offer any money to arrange for his safe arrival. Assisted by his brother, when he returns he finds her alone with Lord Steyne and thus his suspicions regarding her adultery are confirmed. Becky asserts: "I am innocent, Rawdon". Rawdon strikes Lord Steyne and throws him to the ground. Her plans regarding her success are defeated and she sees her husband in a new light, "She admired her husband, strong, brave, and victorious" Steyne is not ready to give her up because he has spent a lot on her.

The greatest flaw in her character is her negligence of her son, little Rawdon from the beginning. "...Mrs. Crawley made an expedition into England, leaving behind her little son upon the Continent, under the care of her French maid" (36, 409). Describing the impact of parting on both, the heartless mother and the son, the narrator writes thus:

The parting between Rebecca and the little Rawdon did not cause either party much pain. She had not, to say truth, seen much of the young gentleman since his birth. After the amiable fashion of French mothers, she had placed him out at a nurse in a village in the neighbourhood of Paris, where little Rawdon passed the first months of his life, not unhappy, with a numerous family of foster brothers in wooden shoes (ibid).

Though the father was concerned about his son, the mother "did not care much to go and see the son and heir". On another occasion, the narrator describes the bitter feelings of the boy towards his mother and her unnatural behaviour to the following effect:
Here, as he grew to be about eight years old, his attachments may be said to have ended. The beautiful mother-vision had faded away after a while. During near two years she had scarcely spoken to the child. She disliked him. He had the measles and the whooping-cough. He bored her. One day when he was standing at the landing-place, having crept down from the upper regions, attracted by the sound of his mother's voice, who was singing to Lord Steyne, the drawing-room door opening suddenly, discovered the little spy, who but a moment before had been rapt in delight, and listening to the music (44, 497).

The mother was insensitive enough to punish her son "violently a couple of boxes on the ear".

Becky Sharp is indifferent like a man. She is never emotional or weak. She brushes aside all those who are a barrier in her way and hence Dan Callahan writes: "The men in Vanity Fair are, by and large, a worthless lot, they are blustery, vain, easily flattered and liable to stray from their wives whenever Becky is around causing mischief." David Cecil rightly believes that one is attracted towards her because she is a wolf; not a lamb; artful, bold and unscrupulous. She also fascinated because she is active and energetic. Despite her vicious nature she is regarded as an outstanding character in English fiction.

As all relationships among the characters of Vanity Fair relating to love and marriage have material basis, Thackeray, through his narrator, comments thus:

Their affections rush out to meet and welcome money. Their kind sentiments awaken spontaneously towards the interesting possessors of it. I know some respectable people who don't consider themselves at liberty to indulge in friendship for any individual who has not a certain competency, or place in society. They give a loose to their feelings on proper occasions (21, 224).
It is confirmed by the fact that the Osbourne family who had no regard for Amelia for a long period of time “became as fond of Miss Swartz in the course of a single evening as the most romantic advocate of friendship at first sight could desire” (224). George’s sisters regarded Miss Swartz, a wealthy heiress, an excellent match, better than the insignificant Amelia. John Osbourne, the father, also tells his son, “...I see Amelia’s ten thousand down you don’t marry her. I’ll have no lame duck’s daughter in my family” (13, 141).

This happens on account of Amelia’s change of circumstances. Also the news of George’s marriage to Amelia enrages Mr. Osbourne, who disowns his son and excludes him from the will. Gina Gora (2003) writes why the Osbournes are inclined towards Miss. Swartz and relates it to the new concept of feminism during the mid-nineteenth century, and writes thus:

Vanity Fair is concerned that money replaces morality as a determinate of value, and the way George’s father and sisters value Miss. Swartz, who is like the window Miller describes, is indicative of this shift in determining value.10

Gino Gora also refers to a comment made by the narrator about the character of Miss. Swartz, who is regarded as “the object of vast respect to the Russel Square family”, and he refers to her property which is the main source of attraction. She, thus, earns respect on account of monetary gains. Gina Gora, to support her viewpoint, quotes Andrew Miller:

Among the dominate concerns motivating mid-Victorian novelists was a penetrating anxiety, most graphically displayed in Thackeray's Vanity Fair, that their social and moral world was being reduced to a warehouse of good and commodities, a display window in which people, their actions, and their convictions were exhibited for the economic appetites of others.\textsuperscript{11}

There are various examples found in the novel to express the value of money in the world of Vanity Fair, which is a replica of his own society. He vividly shows how money counts for everything and that a person is valued accordingly. This is illustrated by the story of Miss. Matilda Crawley, Sir Pitt's unmarried half-sister, who inherited her mother's large fortune. Her wealth and health are her chief attractions. The members of both the Crawley families show their love for her and are keen to take care of her. They pretend to love her in her presence, though they are her enemies. The narrator shows the relevance of money with reference to the two brothers, Sir Pitt and Mr. Brute Crawley, in the following words:

These money transactions—these speculations in life and death—these silent battles for reversionary spoil-make brothers very loving towards each other in Vanity Fair. I, for my part, have known a five-pound note to interpose and knock up a half-century's attachment between two brethren;...(11, 108).

Wealth engenders feelings of envy and characters tend to conspire against one another. For instance, Mrs. Brute; conscious of Becky's popularity at Queen's Crawley, where she performs the function of a governess and was making a good impression on wealthy Miss. Crawley; writes to the headmistress of Pinkerton's school regarding details of

\textsuperscript{11} Gina Gora, ibid.
Becky’s past history. She also detects the growing relationship of love between Becky and Rawdon and encourages them to get closer to each other and even allows them to meet in her house. She intends to get rid of them for it is known to everybody that Miss. Crawley will give her fifty-thousand pounds to Rawdon.

Thackeray’s ironical attitude touches all members of this snobbish society, a factor that secures him a pioneering position among the realists of his age. He ridicules the striking aspect of Miss. Crawley’s character, who despite her being a dreadful radical, turns to a typical Victorian as far as social position in concerned. Miss. Crawley as the narrator describes her:

...was a bel-ésprit, and a dreadful Radical for those days. She had been in France (where St Just, they say, inspired her with an unfortunate passion), and loved ever after, French novels, French Cookery, and French wines. She read Voltaire, and had Rousseau by heart; talked very lightly about divorce, and most energetically of the rights of women...(10:106).

This woman, with her radicality and her energetic belief in the rights of women, spoils Rawdon’s chance of inheriting her wealth for marrying Becky Sharp, who possesses no social status “what a pity that young man has taken such an irretrievable step in the world!” his aunt said,

...with his rank and distinction he might have married a brewer’s daughter with a quarter of a million—like Miss. Grains, or have looked to ally himself with the best families in England. He would have had my money some day or other: or his children would—for I’m not in a hurry to go, Miss. Briggs, although you may be in a hurry to be rid of me; and instead of that, he is a doomed pauper, with a dancing girl for a wife (33: 362-63).
Thackeray, the realist, portrays weak and miserable women who are dominated over by their male counterparts like Amelia Sedley and Ethel Newcome. There are, however, domineering women like Becky Sharp, Mrs. Brute and Mrs. O’ Dowd in *Vanity Fair*, and Beatrix Esmond in *Henry Esmond*. Mrs. Brute; clever, prudent and thrifty; exercises full control over her husband to the extent that she writes his sermons and rules his household, though she never curbs his pleasures.

Mrs. Crawley, the Rector’s wife, was a smart little body, who wrote this worthy divine’s sermons. Being of a domestic turn, and keeping the house a great deal with her daughters, she ruled absolutely within the Rectory, wisely giving her husband full liberty without...(11: 108).

Mrs. O’ Dowd, the General’s wife, is one of the most powerful and influential women depicted by Thackeray. The novelist, through the characters of Colonel Michael O’Dowd and his wife, highlights the idea that there are very strong women who can dominate even the bravest men in the world of *Vanity Fair*. This brave Colonel, under whose command the entire regiment at Madras is quartered, “smokes his hookah after both meals, and puffs as quietly while his wife scolds him”. The narrator gives a glimpse of her character to the following effect:

Her Ladyship, our old acquaintance, is as much at home at Madras as at Brussels—in the cantonment as under the tent. On the march you saw her at the head of the regiment seated on a royal elephant, a noble sight...Lady O’Dowd is one of the greatest ladies in the Presidency of Madras—her quarrel with Lady Smith, wife of Sir Minos Smith the puisne judge, is still remembered by some at Madras, when the Colonel’s lady snapped her fingers in the Judge’s lady’s face, and said she’d never walk behind ever a beggerly civilian (43-482).
Though kind both in act and thought, she is "impetuous in temper: eager to command: a tyrant over her Michael: a dragon among all the ladies of the regiment: a mother to all the young men, whom she tends in their sickness..." (43:483).

Beatrix Esmond, the female protagonist of *Henry Esmond*, resembles Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*. She is endowed by nature with unsurpassed loveliness of body; such as would attract any man; and blessed with the advantages of high birth and worldly position, "with cheeks mantling with health and roses: with eyes like stars shining out of azure, with waving bronze hair...and shape haughty and beautiful". Yet, she does not want to love or to be loved. Her ambition, like Becky Sharp's, is to achieve high status. She rejects all eligible suitors including her humble kinsman, Esmond, who objects to her relations with other men and whom she repulsed thus: "I shall go my own way, sirrah...and I don't want you on the way. You might do if you had an estate...Do you think I'm going to live in a lodging, and turn the mutton at a string whilst your honour nurses the baby?" Then, the Duke of Hamilton, a distinguished Scottish statesman intervenes and she decides to marry him for her greatest satisfaction to be called "Her Excellency". When Esmond expresses his surprise and questions her, she gives a rude answer:

A woman of my spirit, cousin, is to be won by gallantry, and not by sighs and rueful faces. All the time you are worshipping and singing hymns to me. I know very well I am no goddess, and grow weary of the incense. So would you have been weary of the goddess too...when she was called Mrs. Esmond, and got out of humour because she had not pin-money, and was forced to go about in an old gown.
Beatrix's dream, unfortunately, remains unfulfilled for the Duke is killed in a duel. Though Esmond continues to adore her and joins the military to improve his prospects in life, she still condemns him and never treats him as an equal. Her next ambition is to become a royal mistress, but she does not succeed and is left to marry her brother's tutor. This end shows the consequences of the vanity of human wishes. Thackeray also shows that Beatrix's selfishness and dissatisfaction were evident even when she was small,

Beatrix, from the earliest time was jealous of every caress which was given to her little brother Frank. She would fling away even from the maternal arms, if she saw Frank had been there before her.... She should turn...red with rage...; and would sit apart, and not speak for a whole night, if she thought the boy had a better fruit or a large cake than hers.

He further shows that she was shrewd and an artful girl, who knew how to gain the favour of her parents:

She was the darling and torment of father and mother. She intrigued with each secretly, and bestowed her fondness and withdrew it, plied them with tears, smiles, kisses, cajolments; ...when the mother was angry...flew to the father; and sheltering behind him, pursued her victim; when both were displeased, ...watched until she could win back her parents; good grace, either by surprising them into laughter and good-humour, or appeasing them by submission and artful humility.

Even later she never gives up her ambition in securing a high position in the world. She makes all efforts to raise her husband to the position of a Bishop. And, after his death, she becomes Baroness Bernstien, a rich old woman, elevated in status on account of her wealth.
Unlike these affluent women, there is the virtuous and innocent Amelia Sedley, who is disregarded both by critics and the novelist. Thackeray, at times, calls her a heroine, and, then, contradicts himself by depriving her of this title and bestows it upon Becky Sharp. Even critics consider Becky Sharp the heroine of the novel simply because she dominates most of the events of the novel and also because she extracts their interest, attention, and sympathy. But Amelia Sedley still remains conspicuous for she possesses the potentialities of a conventional heroine. She is sweet, self-sacrificing, gentle, tender, and loving. As she is a foil to Becky Sharp, she is considered dull, tender, and sentimental. But, these positive traits are in her character. Despite her weakness she is a real human being who offers genuine love to all those whom she meets, including her deceitful husband. She continues to be a devoted wife till she is awakened by her supporter and lover, William Dobbin. One should not overlook her maternal love for her son, Georgy, whom she offers her unique motherly protection and love. She describes herself as a caring mother thus:

He had been brought up by a kind, weak, and tender woman, who had no pride about anything but about him, and whose heart was so pure and whose bearing so meek and humble that she could not but needs be a true lady. She busied herself in gentle offices and quiet duties; if she never said brilliant things, she never spoke or thought unkind ones; guileless and artless, loving and pure, indeed how could our poor little Amelia be other than a real gentlewoman (59: 664).

She is a gentlewoman and a loving mother, which makes her superior to Becky Sharp, who thinks that wealth
is a substitute for everything. She is devoid of motherly instincts. Thackeray describes the feelings of Amelia to the following effect:

She grows daily more careworn and sad: fixing upon her child alarmed eyes, whereof the little boy cannot interpret the expression. She starts up of a night and peeps into his room stealthily, to see that he is sleeping and not stolen away. She sleeps but little now. A constant thought and terror is haunting her. How she weeps and prays in the long silent nights—how she tries to hide from herself the thoughts which will return to her, that she ought to part with the boy (50: 551).

Her love for her son makes her rather possessive and yet she sacrifices her youth for him and rejects all proposals of marriage.

Amelia Sedley is also a dutiful daughter, who looks after her parents when they are ill and they feel obliged to her. She is very charitable and easily forgives. Becky had been unkind to her, yet she does not abhor her, but rather sympathies with her when her son is taken from her and rushes to console her ungrateful friend. The best reward that Thackeray gives to Amelia is the happy ending of her life when she is united in marriage to her lover, Dobbin.

Thus, one concludes that Thackeray has portrayed women of flesh and blood, most of whom are powerful enough to dominate men and carry out their wishes. He vividly shows them as they are in real life and are both victims of circumstances and assertive. Though they belong to various classes of society, they never fail to live up to the expectations of the reader and the novelist also achieves his purpose of improving their lot and making them the new women of the day who are conscious of their rights and privileges.
CHAPTER 5

The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of Thomas Hardy
The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy is one of the leading novelists at the close of the nineteenth century. His concept of womanhood may be studied in the context of other writers of the Victorian era; namely, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, and Thackeray.

Hardy’s father was a gifted amateur musician, centering his talent on the church services; and his mother was a well-read woman, a characteristic that she bestowed upon her son. Hardy enjoyed reading Shakespeare and going to the opera. He also read the works of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and John Sturart Mill, whose positivism influenced him deeply. He married Emma Lavinia Gifford whose encouragement led him to consider literature as his true vocation.

Unable to find public for his poetry, Hardy was advised by the novelist George Meredith to write a novel. He devoted himself entirely to writing and continued to publish novels regularly. He drew upon his London experiences to write on the marriage market, social ambition and the exploitation of women. He also wrote about rural scene. Then, followed the novels known as “Wessex Novels” or “Novels of Character and Environment” which raised him to the top position among fiction writers. These novels were The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), The Woodlanders (1887), Tess of the d’Urbervilles (1891), and Jude the Obscure (1895). He further published three collections of short stories and five smaller novels.
By this time Hardy was generally recognised, both at home and abroad, as one of England's leading novelists. He wrote on unconventional subjects and was criticised for his frankness and candour.

Thomas Hardy is one of the greatest novelists of the nineteenth-century. He could very well blend in his novels the remarkable qualities possessed by novelists from Fielding to Dickens. Critics hold a favourable opinion about Hardy's unique role in the growth of English fiction. Lascelles Abercrombie (1935), in the introductory chapter to his book entitled, 'Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study', asserts Hardy's contribution to the growth of novel: "he [Hardy] has made it adequate for the high position to which man has latterly elevated it among the arts".¹ Mary Ellen Chase also observes that Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Meredith, and others had used human experience as the base to depict certain relevant issues of life and paved the way for further revelations through writers like Thomas Hardy. Chase points out that with Hardy

the nineteenth century novel was for the first time freed from the sentimental conventions of its predecessors and made the relentless exponent of every passion known to mankind; with him English realism became naturalism, not the minute and completely unrestrained naturalism of several of his French contemporaries, but a realism so far removed from anything that had gone before that it must needs to be termed naturalistic in order to effect a satisfactory comparison.²

No doubt Hardy accepted the influence and imbibed qualities of rare artists yet he was no less original in his own way of writing.

Hardy the novelist does not allow freedom whereby an individual becomes responsible for his acts. The novel for Hardy is a reflection of life itself and not something superimposed. Critics believe that Hardy aimed to give a fairly true picture, at first hand, of the personages, ways, and customs of the characters he created. This picture of humanity is presented in known surroundings based on his keen observation of things. Hardy does not enter into the realm of fantasy but is a scientist, telling precisely what he observes. Hence his realism is equated with naturalism.

In his novels, Hardy puts forward his philosophy of life which has a bearing upon his fatalism and pessimism. Man is depicted as a puppet in the hands of Fate or Destiny. Man has therefore no Free Will and Fate is always there to intervene wherever it likes. He has no free choice in any sphere of life. This is applicable to both male and female characters in his novels. According to Hardy there is a continuous struggle between Man and Fate and Fate is triumphant in this battle. The novels illustrate this philosophy of life through characters and events. For instance, Tess Derbyfield earnestly desires to be a schoolteacher in a village. She does not succeed in her mission because Fate intervenes and she is also deprived of a peaceful life. The fatal role of Fate is felt throughout and is proved by the death of the horse named Prince who was a source of sustenance for the family. This forces the girl to work with the renowned and rich family of d’Urbervilles. She
is thus seduced and it ruins her life to the end. Eustacia Vye's story is not unlike that of Tess or Gabriel Oak and many more, who have ambitions and desires but fail due to their enslavement to Fate. This misfortune is shared by most of the characters in Hardy's novels. The most extreme statement, in F.R. Southerington's words, came from J.S. Smart, in 1922, who writes to the following effect:

[Hardy] insists upon the external causes of disaster, the strange perversities of Nature, Fate, and Chance. His characters are brought to ruin by events over which they have no control, become the playthings of a blind, irresponsible power.³

Hardy also presents a gloomy view of life in his novels. There is no charm in life and happiness and perfection are rare. Man struggles in vain against an unsympathetic Nature and adverse circumstances. Hardy shows both men and women yearning for happiness which is not in their power to attain. They are helpless in the hands of Fate. Yet, he shows the world as he sees it.

Haryd's novels, from a realistic point of view, are social novels. They mostly deal with such problems as marriage, gender, sex, class, motherhood, love, chastity, divorce, etc. Hardy thinks that most problems in life are due to maladjustments in social life. He, therefore, holds society responsible for the miseries in life. In many of his novels, Hardy attacks and criticises the social mores of his time, particularly those relating to the institution of marriage and the male-female relationship within this very institution, which is regarded sacred.

Hardy lived at a time when matrimonial law underwent change, but marriage laws gave more rights to men than to women. According to these laws, the woman when married lost her independent legal personality. Men could divorce their wives solely on the grounds of adultery, but women had to give proof of cruelty, bigamy, incest or infidelity.

Hardy was critical about the stifling aspects of the institution of marriage and conventional views on sexuality. His own views on marriage were radical and even progressive for his time as he conveyed them through his novels; especially in his last two works namely *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. He regarded marriage not merely a means of sexual satisfaction or a sacred bond, but also a contract which can be broken at will. He was of the opinion that marriage should be dissolved as soon as it was inconvenient for either of the parties.

In his last two novels Hardy attacks the conventions of the repressive Victorian society. In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Hardy condemns the unjust social norms that deny Tess a past and does not allow her to lead a new happy marital life, simply because she is a woman. Angel Clare, a typical Victorian, does not forgive her for an unknown sin while Tess has forgiven him for his past experiences. Being a representative of his society, Angel replies, "O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case!" (25:264). In his case it applies because he is a man; but in hers, it does not. He is not willing to divorce her and deserts her in an inhuman way. It was this partiality on the part of social conventions that led Hardy to present the concept of ‘A Pure Woman’. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy’s protagonists. Jude and Sue, seek
divorce and violate the deep-rooted conventions by following their natural instincts in their (sexual) relationship. Commenting on Hardy's views in these two novels, Philip V. Allingham, in an essay entitled, 'The Novels of Thomas Hardy: An Introduction', writes thus:

As a novelist, Hardy felt that art should describe and comment upon actual situations, such as the heavy lot of the rural labourers and the bleak lives of oppressed women. Though the Victorian reading public tolerated his depiction of the problems of modernity, it was less receptive to his religious skepticism and criticism of the divorce laws. His public and critics were especially offended by his frankness about relations between the sexes, particularly in his depicting the seduction of a village girl in Tess, and the sexual entrapment and child murder in Jude."¹

Through his novels one comes to know about Hardy's views on society and marriage and his challenges to its oppressive codes of conduct and their impact on women's lives. One also comes across those women to whom he is sympathetic and who possess qualities of ideal women of his imagination.

In Hardy's Wessex novels, female characters are more prominent. Hardy is at his best in his portrayal of women and proves an expert in his art of character-drawing. His attitude towards women is both complex and unconventional, which critics regard a reflection of his own experiences. Hardy's women are the most energetic and powerful of the sexes. He also has a special regard for his female characters. It is conveyed by Jane Thomas to the following effect:

Hardy's first-hand knowledge of the economic hardships suffered by rural women and their pragmatic attitude to sexual relationships, coupled with his friendships with forward thinking and cultured women in London, encouraged the development of strikingly unconventional conceptions of women and sexuality in his novels.\(^5\)

She also thinks that Hardy thus got the approval of feminist writers like Mary Sinclair and George Egerton during his lifetime.

A close perusal of Hardy's novels brings to light an astonishing range and variety of female characters. There is a great variety of them which shows Hardy's ability to distinguish personalities and subtle distinctions and social status. Sometimes quite opposite traits are seen in his women. For example, Tess has 'a touch of animalism in her flesh.' Sue Bridehead, on the other hand, has a marked 'sexlessness' by her desire for marriage without physical union. Similarly, Elizabeth-Jane, Sue Bridehead and Ethelberta are different from one another. Sue feels a rare fusion of emotion and intellect; Ethelberta is nothing but cool, calculating reason, mathematical even in her love; Elizabeth-Jane is a special type, a little philosopher, the only woman of Hardy with a sense of honour.

Another feature of Hardy's female characters is that they are more vital and forceful than his male characters, who revolve around women like 'obedient satellites' according to Evelyn Hardy. His male figures are seen as either sensual, effeminate or else victims of a kind of

internal attention. This view is expressed by Hardy's critics who observed a rare intensity in Hardy's interest in his female characters. Kate Fitzgibbon, in her class lecture in 1997, points out the change that has started taking shape in Hardy's novels regarding masculine identity, from the 'solid, monolithic, patriarchal role of the mid-1800s, to less typical, nearly feminine styles of manhood.' She continues thus:

With the increasing power of women during the Victorian Era, Hardy creates men who are in a state of ambivalence about their sexuality; they either reach for the well-worn stereotype of the "manly" man, or they attempt to explore their own complicated emotions, sensitive to the needs of the emerging New Woman.6

There are many examples in the novels which show men as overwhelmed rather than overwhelming, dominated rather than dominating, reckless in their relationships with their superior counterparts of the fine sex. Take, for instance, William Boldwood and Gabriel Oak in Far from the Madding Crowd, who make themselves slaves in their love for Bathsheba; or Michael Henchard in The Mayor of Casterbridge, whose obsessive power turns into a sense of being "unmanned"; Jude in Jude the Obscure, with his obsession and seemingly unattainable desire to join Christminster (Cambridge), indulges himself in a cursed sexual relationship with sue Bridehead. In Far from the Madding Crowd, Hardy comments on the superiority of women which is approved by him:

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THE only superiority in women that is tolerable to the rival sex is, as a rule, that of the unconscious kind; but a superiority which recognizes itself may sometimes please by suggesting possibilities of capture to the subordinated man (4:44).

He further describes Gabriel Oak's longing for seeing Bathsheba as that of the dog for its food:

Love being an extremely exacting usurer (a sense of exorbitant profit, spiritually, by an exchange of hearts, being at the bottom of pure passions, as that of exorbitant profit, bodily or materially, is at the bottom of those of lower atmosphere), every morning Oak's feelings were as sensitive as the money-market in calculations upon his chances. His dog waited for his meals in a way so like that in which Oak waited for the girl's presence...(ibid)

Unlike many of his predecessors; who portrayed the woman that lived according to the prescribed societal ideals; Hardy disapproved such female figures and followed his own ideal by drawing radically independent heroines, who; along with beauty, passion and sensitivity; possessed a characteristic strength of character that made them resemble men in their actions and behaviour. Hardy thus preferred independent female protagonists to conventional types who may be termed as androgynous. Hardy's women, according to Carolyn Heilbrum (1973), possess: "prodigious energy, stunted opportunity, and a passion which challenges the entire, limiting world." This does not imply that Hardy created 'perfect' women. On the contrary, Hardy the realist knew woman as the weakest sex, who is more liable to fall a victim to human frailties, like jealousy, envy and flattery. Philip V. Allingham points out this contrast in Hardy's depiction of women thus: "On the one hand, Hardy praises

7 Carolyn Heilbrum. Towards a Recognition of Androgyny. (New York: Knoph, 1973) 70
female advance, strength, passion, and sensitivity; on the other, he depicts women as meek, vain, plotting creatures of mercurial moods". Yet, one feels certain that this is not his defect, it is rather a balanced way of showing the positive and negative aspects of a character.

It is essential to analyse female characters with reference to the novels. This enables one to know Hardy's concept of womanhood, the role of gender and class in the establishment of man-woman relationships in the various social domains, and the impact of the feminist movement on Hardy.

Among Hardy's prominent female characters is the heroine of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba Everdene, whose beauty and charming ways endear her to all, including Gabriel Oak. Her emotional nature and romantic temperament are the marked features of her character. She is also endowed with self-confidence, efficiency, a sympathetic nature, dignity, purity, and candor. Bathsheba's vanity and pride are no doubt disguising for she is conscious of her beauty and looks at the mirror and admires her beauty thus:

She simply observed herself as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind, her thoughts seeming to glide into far-off though likely dramas in which men would play a part--vistas of probable triumphs--the smiles being of a phase suggesting that hearts were imagined as lost and won. (1:28).

Gabriel Oak therefore concludes that she is vain and knows he has been charmed and attracted by her beauty and Hardy comments thus:

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8 Philip V. Allingham, 4
The girl’s thoughts hovered about her face and form as soon as she caught Oak’s eyes conning the same page was natural, and almost certain. The self-consciousness shown would have been vanity if a little more pronounced, dignity if a little less... (3:39)

She is quite independent, daring, wild, and whimsical and therefore her aunt tells Oak, who has come to ask her hand, that Bathsheba is “So good-looking, and an excellent scholar besides—she was going to be a governess once, you know, only she was too wild” (4:47). This wildness in Bathsheba’s character is detected by Bathsheba herself when she directly tells Oak that she cannot marry him because she hates to become men’s property in this regard. Then, she challengingly adds. “It wouldn’t do, Mr. Oak. I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent; and you would never be able to, I know” (4:50).

Hardy, in this novel, shows brilliantly that he is and will never be conventional in his depiction of female characters. Here, he presents his concept of a New Woman, which reminds one of Charlotte Bronte’s depictions of rebellious, daring, and independent women like Jane Eyre and Shirely. The abovementioned passage shows Bathsheba as a “wild and untamed” one who is challenging in her attitude to men. In this connection, Philip V. Allingham, in another essay entitled, “The Power of “No” for Hardy’s Heroines”, comments thus: “Hardy seems to have been fascinated by the one power ‘respectable’, ‘middle-class’ women had in nineteenth-century Britain, the power to say ‘No’ to a prospective suitor”. Bathsheba plays the same trick on William Boldwood, who is equal to her in status.

and whom she provokes to love her by sending him a foolish Valentine card on which she writes “Marry me!” And yet she refuses his proposal. This may be because she felt that Boldwood will not be able to tame her and satisfy her sexual need.

Bathsheba’s self-confidence and androgyny is revealed when; after inheriting her uncle’s farm; she dismisses her bailiff and resolves to manage her farm herself. Though a woman yet she proves that she is very strong and resolute. She frankly tells her subordinates:

Now mind, you have a mistress instead of a master. I don’t yet know my powers or my talents in farming; but I shall do my best and if you serve me well, so shall I serve you. Don’t any unfair ones among you (if there are any such, but I hope not) suppose that because I’m a woman I don’t understand the difference between bad goings-on and good... I shall be up before you are awake’ I shall be afield before you are up... I shall astonish you all (10:96)

And, she does put her thoughts into action and runs the farm affairs successfully like a man. She rides a horse without a sidesaddle and goes to the Sunday market and deals with men perfectly well. The best comment on Bathsheba’s character is given by Rosemarie Morgan, who compares her to Tess to the following effect:

Far from the Madding Crowd is, in many respects, the precursor to Tess of the d’Urbervilles (1891), with the role of Tess split between the trusting home spung girl (Fanny) seduced by the untrustworthy “blue-blood” (Troy), and the courageous, self-determined girl struggling to make her way in a world made by men for men, played by Bathsheba. Unlike Tess, however, Bathsheba is by birth middle-class, by education accomplished, by inclination innovative, daring and adventurous--conversely vulnerable,
unguarded and rash.¹⁰

Hardy, as a matter of fact, has a deep insight into female psychology. He does his best to portray the real character of this strong-headed woman, Bathsheba. He knows that she loves self-admiration and flattery, a flaw that will lead to her tragic end. On her first encounter with Sergeant Troy, who is "...moderately truthful towards men, but to women lied like a Cretan" (25:173), the narrator comments to the following effect:

After all, how could a cheerful wearer of skirts be permanently offended with the man? There are occasions when girls like Bathsheba will put up with a great deal of unconventional behaviour. When they want to be praised, which is often, when they want to be mastered, which is sometimes; and when they want no nonsense, which is seldom (24:171)

This is a psychoanalyst’s review of female psychology. He reveals the foolishness of Bathsheba, who falls a victim to the lies of a man about whom she has been warned by Liddy; her servant; and Gabriel Oak, her sincere lover. Hardy describes her thus:

Bathsheba loved Troy in the way that only self-reliant women love when they abandon their self-reliance. When a strong woman recklessly throws away her strength she is worse than a weak woman who has never had any strength to throw away (29:191)

This is the fate of Bathsheba, a strong woman who becomes weak. And, this weakness affects her marriage. She frankly tells Gabriel Oak she will go to Bath to inform Troy of forgetting the idea of marrying her, but he has challenged

and aroused her womanhood by telling her that he admired a more beautiful woman:

But I was coming away, when he suddenly said he had that day seen a woman more beautiful than I, and that his constancy could not be counted on unless I at once became...And I was grieved and troubled...’And then between jealousy and distraction, I married him! (37: 249-250)

It is not love but jealousy that goaded her to marry him. Hence this weakness led her to marry a philanderer who had an affair with innocent Fanny Robin. This marriage has ill-consequences due to Troy’s spend-thrift ways and lack of concern for the farm. It is only when Bathsheba learns about Fanny’s story that:

Bathsheba burst into great sobs-dry-eyed sobs, which cut as they came, without any softening by tears. But she determined to repress all evidences of feeling. She was conquered; but she would never own it as long as she lived. Her pride was indeed brought low by despairing discoveries of her spoliation by marriage with a less pure nature than her own...Bathsheba had been proud of her position as a woman; it had been a glory to her to know that her lips had been touched by no man’s on earth—that her waist had never been encircled by a lover’s arm. She hated herself now (41:269).

Her agony increases when Fanny’s coffin is brought to her house and Troy kisses Fanny and refuses to do the same to Bathsheba and adds: “Ah! Do taunt me, madam. This woman is more to me, dead as she is, than ever you were, or are, or can be” (43:291). Then, he leaves the town to re-appear after seven years, at a time when Bathsheba gets ready to marry Boldwood; not out of love but to mend her earlier mistake. Unable to cope with the thought of losing Bathsheba once again, Boldwood shoots Troy. This, of course, opens the way
for the loyal Oak to marry her. Throughout her life, Bathsheba, in Rosemarie Morgan’s words,
is repeatedly subjected to judgemental views, to public scrutiny of her private life, to superstitious belief and sexual prejudice, as also to the prevailing laws of matrimony which deprive her of her property and the entitlements she had earned in her own right which are now assigned to her (thriftless) husband upon marriage.11

And this is the fate of all women in this patriarchal society.

With the creation of Eustacia Vye, the heroine of The Return of the Native, Hardy had certainly proved his artistic talent. He had, no doubt, made use of time and space to draw such an immortal picture of this female character, who excelled all other heroines of his novels. He created her rebellious as a man and romantic as a woman and thus combined the strength and beauty of both. In chapter 7, Eustacia is physically described as “full-limbed and somewhat heavy; without rudiness, as without pallor, and soft to the touch as a cloud” (7:72). Her hair is darker than the bleak winter season. Her Pagan eyes were full with nocturnal mysteries. So fine are the lines of her lips that they resemble the point of a spear. Her presence brings memories of things like Bourbon Rose, Tropical Mid-nights and Rubies. Her moods recall lotus-eaters and the march in “Athalie.” Her motion suggests the ebb and flow of the sea and her voice reminds one of a musical instrument.

To strengthen her dignity, Hardy adds further: “Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have the passion and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a

11 Rosemarie Morgan, p.3
model woman” (7:71). She is above her class in dignity. This “Queen of Night” refrains from indulging in plot-making but when she does, her plans and preparations show the comprehensive strategy of a General rather than small arts of common women. Thus, Hardy created an unconventional woman antagonized by the desires of passionate love and the independence of a male:

To be loved to madness—such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive her away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than for any particular lover (7:75)

Yet,

Celestial imperiousness, love, warmth, and fervour had proved to be somewhat thrown away on netherward Edgon. Her power was limited, and the consciousness of this limitation had biased her development. Edgon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto (7:73)

Like the heath, Eustacia is untamed, dark, and wild. Her association with the heath illustrates her masculine qualities thus: “Her appearance accorded well with this smouldering rebelliousness, and the shady splendor of her beauty was the real surface of the sad and stifled warmth within her” (ibid).

Pamela Dalziel (1995) comments on the masculine and feminine images used to describe the character of Eustacia to the following effect:

..., and throughout Hardy’s text, though most notably in the “Queen of Night” chapter, her alignment with the “masculine” is modified by the use of equality extravagant female images. Hardy probably did not envision Eustacia as masculine per se but as distinct
from the conventional middle-class “womanly” norm...\(^{12}\)

Anyhow, Eustacia Vye may be considered androgynous for her passion, rebelliousness, and shows a refusal to accept the confines of Edgon. She may be described as an untamed romantic emotion and fantasy, and has little concern for the effects of her actions. To the extent that the narrator asks, “Why did a woman of this sort live on Edgon Heath?” (7:73). These characteristics make Eustacia less typical of women who lived during the Victorian age. But, the scene in which her ‘masculine’ behaviour is most evident occurs during the Mummer’s play when she disguises herself in men’s clothes: “I can get boy’s clothes-at least all that would be wanted besides the mumming dress” (II:4:130), she tells Charley. The narrator comments thus: “..., and Eustacia felt more and more interested in life. Here was something to do; here was some one to see, and a charmingly adventurous way to see him” (II: 4:131). Eustacia wishes to free herself from the restrictions society imposed on her. She wants to have close affinity with Clym Yeobright, who has just returned from Paris. She thinks that Clym, a broadminded person, will be generous enough to relieve her from the suffocating atmosphere of Edgon Heath. She does succeed in enticing him into a love-relationship; and then, marrying him against the will of his mother.

Eustacia, a rebellious woman, cares for none but herself and thinks about achieving her objectives. First, she

falls in love with Damon Wildeve and succeeds in dominating him, though she knows that he has already proposed to Thomasin. She even challenges Diggory Venn, who threatens her of spreading the news of her relationship with Damon throughout Edgon Hill. Hardy comments on it thus:

The reddleman's hint that rumour might show her to disadvantage had no permanent terror for Eustacia. She was as unconcerned at that contingency as a goddess at a lack of linen. This did not originate in inherent shamelessness, but in her living too far from the world to feel the impact of public opinion (1:10:100).

He writes further:

As far as social ethics were concerned Eustacia approached the savage state, though in emotion she was all the while an epicure (ibid).

Eustacia can sacrifice even her love for the achievement of her purpose. She is confined to Edgon as Clym decides to remain a school-master. Both Eustacia and his mother try to convince him to change his mind but in vain. This increases Eustacia's frustration and feeling of loneliness. The death of Clym's mother and the false allegation of her involvement in it adds to her misery, and she decides to commit suicide. She is saved by Wildeve in her attempt to do so, and in her bewilderment and lack of resources Eustacia expresses her sorrow at her tragic fate in the following words:

How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me... I do not deserve my lot! ...O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven
to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all! (4:7:354)

Hardy believed destiny controlled human beings. Women also seeking self-improvement or indulged in acts of independence or wished to follow their way of life or carry out their ambitions were rendered helpless. In a society run by educated men who were responsible for its well-being one can cite the example of Clym Yeobright. Eustacia Vye has no option left but to give up an imprisoning environment to go to Paris and she got drowned on her way.

Tess Derybeyfield is a strong and courageous woman as H.C. Duffin writes thus:

Among Hardy's women Tess Durbeyfield claims attention first, not only by reason of popularity, but more especially in that her creator distinguished her by the appellation of "a pure woman."\(^{13}\)

And, according to Philip V. Allingham, of all Hardy's women, surely it is Tess who has won the greatest respect for her strength and struggle to be treated as an individual. She is passionate, intelligent, humane, responsible, powerful and without any supposed feminine weakness. Though a victim of social pressure Tess is always self-determined and strong enough to struggle and even challenge all kinds of opposition.

Tess, like Hardy's heroines, is endowed with beauty. Hardy describes her thus: "beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet" (1:11:102). Her exceptional good looks bring her unwanted attention from men. And what proves unfortunate for her is

\(^{13}\) H.C. Duffin. Thomas Hardy: A study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems and the Dynasts. (Delhi: Doaba House, 1993) 218
her mature sexual appearance, “a luxuriance of aspect, a fullness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was” (1:5:65), a feature that she inherited from her mother. And, by trying to enhance her good looks, her mother dresses her up with the best she has ever had, which: “Imparted to her developing figure an amplitude which belied her age, and might cause her to be estimated as a woman when she was not much more than a child” (72-73). She is regarded a woman by Alec d’Urbervilles and it ruined her life.

Tess has led a difficult life and her parents were responsible for it because her father was an alcoholic and mother a careless and incompetent housekeeper. This leads her to assume responsibility for her younger siblings. This concern has led her to drive Prince, the horse, with her younger brother as a companion rather than ask someone else to do the job, “Oh no—I wouldn’t have it for the world! Declared Tess proudly” (1:4:51). She then takes full responsibility for Prince’s death, to the extent of feeling like a murderess. It is actually this feeling that causes her to acquiesce in her mother’s scheme to go to the d’Urbervilles for help. Although “she had hoped to be a teacher at the school” Tess’s purpose for going there is a noble one, “going about her business with some self-assurance in the thought of acquiring another horse for her father by an occupation which would not be onerous” (1:6:71). This leads to an opposition between the mother and the daughter as Hardy comments on it to the following effect:

Being mentally older than her mother she did not regard Mrs. Durbeyfield’s matrimonial hopes for her in a serious aspect for a moment. The light-minded
woman had been discovering good matches for her daughter almost from the year of her birth (1:6:72).

Ian Mackean (2001) points out that there is a relativity of moral values in which the clash of attitudes between the mother and her daughter is caused because “Tess’s education has given her a wider and more advanced outlook, transcending the parochial conventions of her mother’s world.”

Tess's struggle against the social conventions begins at home and is brilliantly indicated by the narrator in the very beginning, when he comments thus:

Between the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained Natural teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinary understood. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed (1:3:44-45)

It is therefore a clash between the old and the new generation.
Tess rebels against social conventions when she tries to baptize her child after his birth and is prevented from doing so. Besides this the most debated issue in the novel is her loss of virginity that ruined her life forever.

Though she is economically dependent on Alec d’Urbervilles and is socially inferior to him Tess has resisted his advances on the night when the incident of her seduction takes place. Tess, after the dance of Chaseborough, refuses Alec's offers to take her home and goes with him just to escape from a confrontation with Car

Darch and the others. The narrator comments on the obligation of the circumstance thus:

At almost any other moment of her life she would have refused such proffered aid and company, as she had refused them several times before; ...But coming as the invitation did at the particular juncture when fear and indignation at these adversaries could be transformed by a spring of the foot into a triumph over them, she abandoned herself to her impulse (1:10:95)

She has disliked his love-making and puts herself on the defensive, "with one of those sudden impulses of reprisal to which she was liable she gave him a little push from her....he nearly lost his balance" (1:11:97-98). Those who claim that Tess submits herself willingly to Alec are mistaken because she disapproves of the gifts sent to her family and exclaims thus: "‘O how very good of you that is!’ with a painful sense of the awkwardness of having to thank him just then" (1:11:100). Alec left her alone and "Tess became invisible and she fell into reverie upon the leaves where he had left her" (ibid). Tess falls into a reverie and was in the same state when the accident, which resulted in the death of Prince, took place. "Tess!" calls Alec upon his return, but:

There was no answer. The obscurity was not so great that he could see absolutely nothing but a pale nebulousness at his feet, ...Everything else was blackness alike. D'Urberville stooped; and heard a gentle regular breathing. He knelt and bent lower, till her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers. She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes there lingered tears (1:11:101)

It is therefore a case of rape as seduction requires mutual indulgence on both sides. And, Hardy rightly calls the novel "A Pure Woman", for she proves herself pure at the end. She
The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of Thomas Hardy

has been so throughout but Hardy questions: "Where was Tess's guardian Angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith?" (ibid). It is, in fact, an expression of cruelty and Tess becomes a victim of her economic conditions, her mother's greed and lack of far-sightedness, her own fate and exploitation of man. Describing its inevitability and cruelty, Hardy writes thus:

Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive;... the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man... (1:11:102).

When she returns home and questioned by her mother she explodes thus:

O mother, my mother! cried the agonized girl, turning passionately upon her parent as if the poor heart would break. 'How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me? (2:12:111).

She further refers to her ignorance in this regard:

Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me! (ibid)

The mother was reluctant to perform her motherly duty like a responsible woman before sending her daughter to an absolutely unknown world for she was afraid that Tess "would be hontish wi' him and lose your chance" (ibid).

Tess's acceptance of society's judgment makes her indulge in sin. She was not directly involved in the matter and Hardy comments thus:

It was they that were out of harmony with the actual word, not she. Walking among the sleeping birds in
the hedges... she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence...(2:13:114-115).

She chooses to isolate herself from the community and is turned into a complex woman. She is physically attractive and has acquired “liberal education”. She decides to make a new beginning in life, works on a farm and, meanwhile, gives birth to Sorrow, her child, to whom she is attached, “The baby’s offence against society in coming into the world was forgotten by the girl-mother; her soul’s desire was to continue that offence by preserving the life of the child” (2:14:122). When the child is ill and is breathless, Tess cries, “‘O merciful God; have pity; have pity upon my poor baby!’ ‘Heap as much anger as you want to upon me, and welcome; but pity the child!’” (2: 14:123) Tess is a kind generous mother. She christens the child before it dies and when it is to be baptized and buried and the vicar refuses to entertain her, Tess bursts out thus: “Then I don’t like you!’ ‘and I’ll never come to your church no more!’” (2:14:127). She rebels not only against the vicar but also against the religious laws and religion itself. She buries her child at the cost of a shilling and a pint of beer to the sexton. In this connection, Ian Mackean (2001) writes thus: “Tess adheres to no doctrine or tradition and represents Hardy’s direct challenge to both when she confronts the vicar on the subject of her baby’s baptism and burial”. He further comments that:

Hardy undermines the authority of the vicar by calling him a “tradesman” and showing how Tess’s genuine human feelings sway his nobler feelings against his doctrine... we are made to feel that the refusal was more off to Christianity than to Tess.
After her baby’s death, Tess determines to seek solace by becoming a dairymaid on a farm away from home. There she meets Angel Clare, a young man from a good family, drawn to Tess by her simplicity and her misery. She tries to put him off on account of her past life which will keep Angel away from her. And, it proves true!

Tess accepts his love and agrees to marry Angel Clare; and also tries to reveal her past to him. At first his indulgent attitude causes her to retreat and then her letter slips under the rug and her effort to confess fails. Angel Clare, however, perceives Tess as “a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature”. The thought of purity also recurs in Angel’s thoughts. Unfortunately, his concept of purity and virtue is rather conventional; he equates it with physical virginity. He is intellectually liberated and does not subscribe to the religious beliefs of his father and refuses to become a minister. And yet he is basically a conservative person.

Angel is moved to confess his sexual transgression on the night of their wedding. Like Tess, he wanted to confess this during their courtship but he was afraid to lose her. She warmly and immediately forgives him, and he accepts her forgiveness easily, “Then we will dismiss it at once and forever!” (4:34:261) Tess is sinful in this regard and hopes to be forgiven by him but he replies: “O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case! You were one person; now you are another. My God—how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque-pretidigitation as that!” (4:34:264).
Now Angel is no longer the same liberal man; he is conventional to the core. This also reflects the dual personality of a man in Victorian society. Asha Kanwar (1991) comments on Arnold Kettle’s second study of the novel, and writes to the following effect:

There is a greater awareness of the woman question in Kettle’s analysis of 1982 as compared with that of 1951. For instance, when Tess confesses her past experience, Angel recoils from her saying “the woman I have been loving is not you “...Kettle takes this as proof of the “process of idealization of women so deep in the Victorian ethos”. But the double standards are so evident, for the same lapse in Angel is forgivable whereas in Tess it is not.17

Again, Tess is depressed, lonely, and falls as a prey to the indifference of an insensitive man who chooses to suppress his love for her and obeys conventional rules he does not really believe in. Once again she is to struggle in life and yet is capable of proving her purity and innocence.

The economic conditions render Tess powerless enough to respond passively to Alec’s seduction, but she is also capable of murdering her oppressor on her husband’s return from Brazil. She dies like a heroine. Asha Kanwar (1991) points out that in literary convention the woman is depicted either as Madona or a whore but Tess belongs to neither of these categories. Tess is described as a fresh, virginal, pagan child of nature who finally hardens into accepting the position of a mistress. By designating her a “pure woman” contrary to societal conventions;

Hardy is clearly taking a stand in favour of women in Tess’s position. At one level, it might seem as if Tess is passively accepting her lot, (not by “blind fate” but

by society) she is quietly but heroically coming to terms with her situations. She cannot change the world, but she changes her situation as best as she possibly can, culminating in her final act of self-assertion, the murder of her seducer, which can be taken as her rejection of the society that has nothing better to offer to women like her.\textsuperscript{18}

Hardy was evidently a feminist who showed a great interest in his female characters. Tess was his portrayal of a perfect woman.

The next significant female character is Sue Bridehead; the heroine of Jude the Obscure; who according to H.C. Duffin (1993) is Tess's most dangerous rival. Sue Bridehead is described as boyish, sexless, Voltairean and unconventional. She is a complex character, is passionate, sensual and yet sexless; she is unconventional and yet conforms to social conventions at the end of the novel, where she emerges as powerful, brave and even androgynous.

Hardy creates in Sue a symbol of radical deviance and thus supports his perverse, negative view of a society that victimizes all those who choose to ignore socially acceptable standard. This is true of Sue Bridehead. At first, Sue is regarded a tomboy in mannerism, joining boys in their exploits. Thus, she tells Jude that she “has no fear of men” and that she has “mixed with them almost as one of them” (118). She also asserts that she is a virgin, “I have remained as I began”, a characteristic that contributes to her being ‘sexless’. Phillotson, Sue’s husband, describes her aversion to sex when he tells his friend, Gillingham, “She jumped out

\textsuperscript{18} Asha Kanwan, 186.
of window...so strong was her dread of me!” (183) He bitterly states the truth: “what must a woman’s aversion be when it is stronger than her fear of spiders” (176). Sue, in fact, despises sex even when it is a legal prostitution in the form of marriage. She tells Jude, “Though I like Mr. Phillotson as a friend, I don’t like him... it is a torture to live with him as a husband” (p.169). Marriage to her is not a sacred bond, “I at least don’t regard marriage as a Sacrament” (p. 166), she speaks thus when she comes to know about Jude’s marriage to Arabella. When she reveals her engagement to Phillotson she becomes defensive: “I shall tell you! said she with perverseness that was part of her... I have promised that I will marry him” (p.134).

When she leaves her husband and decides to live with Jude, they both seek divorce from their spouses. They break everlasting and prevalent conventions by asking for divorce, an act that is shocking as well as challenging to the Victorians. St. Andrews, in an essay on the issue of divorce, comments to the following effect:

The treatment of divorce in the novel suggests the narrator’s sympathies with contemporary feminist argument; this is felt still more in the account (or in the refusal to give an account) of Sue’s dislike of sexual relations with Phillotson. The refusal to explain (explain away?) Sue’s feeling is not a failure of realism, but a mark of Hardy’s attempt to get beyond realism. TH’s feminist position may be linked with J.S. Mill’s central argument, that ‘what is now called the nature of women is an eminently arbitrary thing, i.e., precisely not natural but socially constructed. Hardy challenges the late Victorian science which tried to show, in opposition to Mill, that women’s nature was biologically given;...but what TH shows is the operation of cultural and political forces, which leaves open the possibility of
When Jude and Sue are free they decide to live with each other independent of all obligations. Yet, Sue remains ‘sexless’ “you...are such a phantasmal, bodiless creature...who...has so little animal passion in you” (272), Jude tells her. Jude persuades her to marry him, but Sue tries to postpone it. She feels that marriage is an “iron contract” which will extinguish tenderness, and so she would “much rather go on living always as lovers ...and only meeting by day” (271). She further argues that it is against man’s nature to go on loving a person when he is told that he must and shall be that person’s lover. In their next attempt at marriage the wedding is not accomplished, though Sue declares, “let us go home without killing our dream” (301). This is her view of marriage, which contradicts that of society and religion. In desperation to prevent their marriage to take place, Sue questions him: “Don’t you dread the attitude that it sensibly arises out of legal obligation? Don’t you think it is destructive to a passion whose essence is its gratuitousness?” (286). She fears that marriage kills love, and to her, it is more like a sacrifice. She comments on marriage thus: “The flowers in the bride’s hand are sadly like the garland which decked the heifers of sacrifice in old times” (301). Finally, she comes up with her radical opinion with regards to marriage when she frankly puts it thus: “Fewer women like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to cater” (272).

Sue’s peculiar character is further revealed to Jude because in his imagination she is an ideal, but in reality she does not live up to his expectations. Rather, she is a complex woman, with flaws and inconsistencies, and therefore does not fit into the mould that Jude has made for her. The most shocking flaw in her is made evident when she allows herself to indulge or rather to transform her relationship with Jude from a spiritual one into a sexual relationship. In this respect, she is no longer ‘sexless’ or ‘spiritual’. This change is due to jealousy, a trait that she shares with Bathsheba Everdene, as discussed earlier. When she sees Arabella, Jude’s former wife, she feels jealous and consequently submits herself to Jude, who says of her:

You spirit, you disembodied creature, you dear, sweet, tantalizing phantom...hardly flesh at all; so that when I put my arms around you I almost expect them to pass through you as through air (256-257)

in contrast with Arabella, whom he sees as “...a complete and substantial female animal...no more, no less” (36).

Sue believes that self-realisation is possible only through leading an independent life. Regarding divorce, she expresses her views thus: “I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one has done so ignorantly” (272). She cannot bear “the necessity of being responsive to Phillotson whenever he wishes” (273), and Victorian values expect a woman to be responsive to her husband. Thus the Victorians condemned the novel.

Sue is capricious and therefore after her escape from the training school, she says that Phillotson “is the only man in the world for whom I have any respect or fear”, and
also that “I don’t care for him...I shall do just as I choose” (160). In the same scene Sue forbids Jude to love her, but then immediately sends a note saying, “if you want to love me, Jude, you may” (161). Jude feels vexed with Sue knowing that she is capricious, and becomes aware of “the elusiveness of her curious double nature” (219).

This domineering woman with her radical views regarding marriage and individual freedom believes marriage to be a contract of society that enslaves and binds a couple to endless happiness. She feels that her elopement with Jude will not bring them the happiness they yearn for. She regrets leaving Phillotson and decides to return to him, despite the fact that she condones the act of marriage: “I don’t love him, I must, must, own it, in deepest remorse! But I shall try to learn to love him by obeying him” (306). She also asks Jude to do the same. This happens when they have become victims of miserable economic conditions and their rejection by all. What is more is the suicide of their children at the hands of Jude’s son from Arabella. This is the adverse effect of their elopement. Hardy, thus, depicts the enormous power society has over its members. It also shows the misery of those who do not abide by the social and religious conventions. Sue Bridehead, who is described as “a creation of civilization”, who despite her strength of mind and virtues cannot find happiness in a patriarchal society.

Hardy’s other female protagonists are less prominent than those described above. They cannot excel those mentioned earlier. Elfride Swancourt the heroine in A Pair of Blue Eyes is quite feminine and possesses bright blue eyes and masses of blond hair. She tends to conceal her previous
relationship with Stephen Smith from her suitor, Henry Knight, who happens to be Stephen’s friend. Yet, critics over the years have been debating over the power of Elfride. Some are of the opinion that she lacks power and complexity of character while others feel that she is one of Hardy’s most provocative and striking heroines. Pamela Jekel maintains that:

Lawrence’s implication is that, indeed, the tragedy is not very great at all, since Elfride has not had the strength to throw off even “the first little hedge of convention”. In fact, the story of Elfride is at least poignant if not a classical tragedy, precisely because she does have the potential for such strength, because she does have many heroic qualities, and because she is betrayed by love...both false and true...and sadly, betrayed with her own complicity.20 (Quoted in Glen Downey’s essay: A Pair of Blue Eyes and its Critics)

Still Elfride is considered weak. It is because she gives up Stephen simply because he is socially inferior and connects her with her country past, though he is an ambitious man who adores her. Secondly, in her anxiety about her relationship with Stephen, she allows herself to be treated as a child. Therefore, Henry breaks off the engagement on account of her relationship with another man. And, Elfride later marries Lord Luxellian, with whom she remains dissatisfied. She finally dies. Elfirde does not come up to the expectations of men, her parents and society. Her failure to confess her past makes her afraid of Henry, who represents society which never forgives a woman for a past life that is undesirable.

The story of Grace Melbury, the heroine of The
Woodlanders, is more or less the same as that of Elfride Swancourt. Grace's emotional relations with Giles Winterbourne are described in highly romantic terms: "could see far into the recesses of heaven as they mused and walked, the eye journeying on under a species of golden arcades" (28:156). And to affirm the legitimacy of their union, Grace abandons herself, "to the seductive hour and scene...her senses revelled in the sudden lapse back to nature unadorned", and she experiences "revolt for the nonce against social law" and a "passionate desire for primitive life" (28:156-157). Her profound sensation, rebellious desire and power turn into self-conceitedness and meekness. On her return from the fashionable school to which she was sent to acquire education, her social superiority to her rustic lover, and Gile's financial wreck prompts her father to break their engagement. Grace obeys her ambitious father to marry Edred Fitzpier. She does not show disapproval despite the fact that she suspects the young doctor, Fitzpier, to have relations with Suke Damwealthy, a village girl. Grace and Fitzpier are attracted towards each other, and Giles loses Grace's affection. They get married but this union is soon challenged by Fitzpier's secret affair with Ms. Charmond, a wealthy widow. Grace learns of her husband's adultery, and is annoyed and feels humiliated. It is too late for her to repent for her rash decision and the feeling of superiority regarding her honest lover, Giles. Contemplating the bounty of the season, Grace wonders that, "some kernels, were unsound as her own situation, and she wondered if there were one world in the universe where the fruit had no worm, and marriage no sorrow" (28:155).
Prompted by her father, Grace is forced to evaluate her marriage. With a hope to be divorced by her husband Grace again comes close to Giles, but she is disillusioned for Fitzpier returns from his travels with Felice Chamond. He exhibits his feelings of regret and she meekly turns to him.

Grace's father comments thus:

But let her bear in mind that the woman walks and laughs somewhere at this very moment whose neck he'll be coling next year as he does her to-night; and as he did Felice Chamond last year, and Suke Damon's the year afore!

Fitzpier's cruelty is exhibited after he comes to know about Grace's social status, "Instead of treasuring her image as a rarity he would at most have played with her as a toy. He was this kind of man" (27:95). Grace Melbury, a liberated woman, overlooks the faults of her noble love and is betrayed by him. She is an ordinary woman who does possess the required qualifications of a heroine. Critics go to the extent of considering Marty South the real heroine of the novel. And, this proves true. Marty is the real heroine for she has profound courage. While Grace's love for Giles lasts for a few months, Marty's mute love sustains beyond the grave, "Now, my own, own love, ...If ever I forget your name let me forget home and heaven!" Marty is uncomplaining and is persevering. She has typically masculine traits in her, for instance she takes on the responsibility of her father and performs physical labour. She is thus stronger and more efficient than Grace.

Elizabeth-Jane, too, plays a significant role in The Mayor of Casterbridge, though she does not rise to the status of a real heroine. She is beautiful, intelligent, and ambitious.
Early in the novel, both her beauty and her innate intelligence raise her above poverty. She has no education and prospects in life, but once her economic conditions are improved as she has become the mayor's daughter, Elizabeth-Jane becomes conspicuous in all sphere of life. She is known for her beauty and is admired by young men, including Farfrae, "Everybody was attracted, and some said that her bygone simplicity was the art that concealed art" (15:107). Elizabeth-Jane; unlike any other girl of her time, enjoys nice clothes that Henchard's money allows her to buy, but she is intelligent and sensible enough not to take advantage of her improved lot. In this regard the narrator admires her thus:

It might have been supposed that, given a girl rapidly becoming good-looking, comfortably circumstanced, and for the first time in her life commanding, and for the first time in her life commanding ready money, she would go and make a fool of herself by dress. But no. The reasonableness of almost everything that Elizabeth did was no-where more conspicuous than in this question of clothes...This unsophisticated girl did it by an innate perceptiveness that was almost genius... (14:100).

She also takes advantage of her leisure hours by reading to improve her lot.

Elizabeth-Jane becomes impressive chiefly by her simplicity, loyalty, and sense of satisfaction with whatever she has. When Farfrae abandons her for Miss Templeman, Elizabeth-Jane withdraws quietly although she loves him. Again, when Henchard, after Elizabeth's mother's death, offered her his surname, "you'll take my surname now--hey? Your mother was against it; but it will be much more pleasant to me. 'Tis legally yours, you know" (19:130); she accepts it.
Any other girl would have rejoiced, but not the loyal Elizabeth, "Here she remained in silence, and wept,—not for her mother now, but for the genial sailor Richard Newson, to whom she seemed doing a wrong" (19:131)

Elizabeth-Jane does not retain any bitterness and finally marries Farfrae after his wife's death. And although she lashes out at Henchard when she finds out that he has lied to keep her away from her real father, Newson, but she soon forgives him and goes to find him. She is really touched by Henchard's will upon his death and honours his wishes. She is therefore worthy to be esteemed and admired.

Like Elizabeth-Jane, young Thomasin Yeobright is presented as the opposite of Eustacia Vye in The Return of the Native. Thomasin is an innocent girl, who is treated roughly by circumstances and men. Thus in a conversation with her aunt, Mrs. Yeobright, Thomasin tells her about her miserable plight:

I am a warning to others; just as thieves and drunkards and gamblers are... what a class to belong to! Do I really belong to them? Tis absurd! Yet why, Aunt, does everybody keep on making me think that I do, by the way they behave towards me? Why don't people judge me by my acts? Now, look at me as I kneel here, picking up these apples--do I look a lost woman? (2:2:117)

She adds vehemently, "I wish all good women were as good as I!" (ibid) Throughout the novel, Thomasin tries to be good, but she is misunderstood and misjudged, or, at least, she feels so. She wants to be good to everybody and is treated kindly by everyone except her husband, Damon Wildeve. She is quite normal but rather conventional in her
views. She never aspires for the impossible, never challenges or resists her fate and at the end of the novel she is conveniently disposed of for a happy future with the right man. R.P. Bhatnagar and Rajul Bhargava, in their introduction to the novel, comment thus:

After the principal characters have staged their exit, Diggory and Thomasin survive. Hardy seems to be onc (once) again pressing the point that those who respect tradition survive; those who rebel against it have a tragic end. It is no wonder then that the best contenders for survival are the totally unpretentious and unambitious heathmen and healthwomen (10).

Thomasin does bear the irony of fate with tightlipped patience. Indeed, it is for her patience and virtue that she is rewarded in the end.

In the history of English fiction, no other woman is ever presented in the way Susan Henchard is portrayed in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Her being sold off to the highest bidder shows to what extent Hardy ironically attacks the conventions prevalent in his time. It also brilliantly shows his awareness about female subjugation in the nineteenth century England. For a woman to be sold along with her daughter like any other item by her own husband is awful, yet it reflects a truth. Susan Henchard’s case is not rare for according to Hardy,

It may seem strange to sophisticated minds that a sane young matron could believe in the seriousness of such a transfer; and were there not numerous other instances of the same belief the thing might scarcely be credited. But she was by no means the first peasant woman who religiously adhered to her purchaser, as too many rural records show (4:44).

Philip V. Allingham, in an essay entitled, “*The Wife Sale in The Mayor of Casterbridge*” writes that in the Macmillan
As the novel starts Susan Henchard is portrayed as being naïve and resigned to an existence over which she has no control. While the bargaining process is on, "The young woman, his wife, who seemed accustomed to such remarks, acted as if she did not hear them" (1:29). It was one of the ill-consequences of taking alcohol in excess. Henchard has already had the intention to dispose of his wife and daughter. Elaine Showalter of Princeton University comments that the scene dramatizes the analysis of female subjugation and describes it as an ill-consequence of capitalism. She adds that it verifies that in early nineteenth-century England women of her class in rural districts were regarded a stock to be disposed off at their owner's whim.

While the bargain is going on Susan neither comments nor protests or even resists. On the contrary, she passively accepts the act of being sold. She assumes that the transaction is valid and that she must accompany the sailor, Newson, and stay with him. Showalter, once again, points out that Hardy tells very little about the relationship between Henchard and his wife, Susan; and that what is
seen in the early scenes does not show that she is drooping or complaining. She insists that;

Her role, however, is a passive one; severely constrained by her womanhood, and further burdened by her child, there is no way that she can wrest a second chance out of life. She cannot master events, but only accommodate herself to them.21

Nevertheless, Susan lives on good terms with the sailor for many years and bears him a child before a friend finally makes her realize that she is not bound by Henchard’s act.

After the sailor is presumed dead at sea, she sets out to find Henchard, not for her own sake but to benefit her poor daughter. When she finds him as the mayor of Casterbridge, she never thinks of taking advantage of it or of ruining him. She only thinks of securing good life for her daughter. She dies after she has made Elizabeth-Jane safe.

There are so many instances in the novel which illustrate Hardy’s sympathy and deep concern over the sufferings of women. He brings to light almost all kinds of problems faced by women during the Victorian age. Mrs. Yeobright, in The Return of the Native, is represented as a victim of motherhood. Fate plays its role of depriving her of the desire to reconcile with her own son, Clym, who marries Eustacia against her will. The money that she sends him as a gift is lost in gambling; and finally, she dies with the realization that she is ignored by her son. In Far from the Madding Crowd, Fanny Robin becomes a victim of the hostility of fate for she goes to the wrong church to lose a chance of legalizing her relationship with Seargent Troy, and she dies on her way to seek him. In Jude the Obscure,

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Jude's son from Arabella feels the burden and undergoes the hardships of life. He, therefore, decides to end his life and that of his brothers.

Hardy was undoubtedly aware about women being subjugated and their miserable plight. He also highlights the fact that those women who try to change their lot in this patriarchally-dominated society ultimately fail, and will not survive as in the case of Eustacia Vye and Tess Durbeyfield; for they have to conform, willy-nilly, to the social conventions as in the case of Sue Bridehead. Hardy was also aware of the weaknesses of women, such as jealousy, envy, love of flattery, etc. His psycho-analysis of women is a unique feature of his character-study.
Conclusion
CONCLUSION

In this study the concepts of 'womanhood' and 'feminism' are defined. The 'concept of womanhood' refers to the state of woman, the 'concept of feminism' is broader in scope as it concerns itself with the position of women in society and their relation to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic. It also indicates that 'womanhood' is essentially concerned with the personal or individual characteristic traits of a woman, which are believed to be biological, intellectual, and cultural. A woman is identified as the opposite of man and described as passive, meek, timid, emotional, and conventional. These concepts are therefore interrelated.

The social history of feminism both as an ideology and a movement goes back to the eighteenth century and beyond. Thus an account about the position of women in the Western society throughout the past two centuries or so is given and light is thrown on the struggle women underwent to establish themselves as fully independent human beings in their respective societies. It is shown how they overcame the barriers put for them in such a patriarchally dominated society. One also learns about achievements got in this regard, and how this movement affected the various political, religious, economic, cultural, societal, familial, and artistic spheres.

It is observed that the European women started thinking about women and their rights before the French Revolution. Hence they questioned the established social norms and came up with advanced radical views about the
rights of women. This intellectual movement was not merely led by men like Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire and Kant, but women also tried to assert themselves and speak about women’s rights. It was not an easy task for both intellectuals and women activists to carry out their radical activities, as there were so many obstacles in their way. But, the factors that helped them tackle all these were some Utopian movements; such as the Fourierists, St. Simonians and Owenites; which inspired women to carry on their campaign and provided them with platforms to convey their ideas relating to political participation of women; and the existence of new technological advances, such as the penny postage and the transatlantic cable, which enabled the European feminists to initiate correspondence with their American counterparts.

In this respect Mary Wollstonecraft and Charles Fourier played a significant role whose ideas paved the way for the later feminists and inspired them to take further steps in the struggle for freedom. With the emergence of a new breed of feminists like Harriet Martineau, Flora Tristan and John Stuart Mill among others, new possibilities for the movement to transform the existing institutions that excluded women from any realm of society were created.

Further a brief history of feminism in the United States, where it appeared as a well-organised and powerful movement, is given. It led to women’s vigorous participation in reform radical movements, especially anti-slavery. It also highlights the roles played by women like Sarah and Angelina Grimke, Abbie Kelly, Lucretia Mott and Luch Stone, whose efforts led to a better understanding of the
women's conditions and the realisation of the first Women's Right Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, 1848.

Though the period that followed the Civil War was a set-back for the women's movement, yet the women activists continued their struggle for freedom to the end. Therefore, many women suffrage organisations came into existence, the most prominent being The National Woman Suffrage headed by Elizabeth Cady Stanon and Susan B. Anthony in 1869. This organization continued to play a significant role for a period of 72 years.

Twentieth century is a period in which the term 'feminism' came into existence for the first time and it divides the long suffrage movement from modern feminism. It led to some major developments which paved the way for the feminist revival in the next decades.

Feminist Literary Criticism defines its nature for in terms of interpretation of literature. It is related to the nature of male and female experiences and is mainly concerned with the representation of women in literature, and their position in society by freeing them from oppressive restraints. It starts with the works of feminism that appeared in the first half of the 20th century, particularly Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). These played an important role in the development of feminist literary criticism and influenced, to a great extent, the later works of feminist critics during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Some feminist approaches are referred to in the study of literary texts, like Gender Studies, Marxist Feminist Approach, Psychoanalytical Feminist Approach, and
Minority Feminist Approach. Through these approaches one can study the 'concept of womanhood' held by the writers concerned. The study thus reveals if women play primary or marginal roles in their society. From a Marxist perspective, it attempts to find out whether 'social realism' is found in the texts or not. If so, relations between the two sexes are highlighted. Psychoanalytical approach helps in analyzing the feminine images, the language, the narrative technique and characterization. The study also aims at finding out if the texts also deal with topics relating to the minorities, such as the blacks, the lesbians, children and others.

A historical note on the status of women in the Victorian age is given at the end of the introductory chapter. The section vividly describes the man-woman relationship within and outside the realm of marriage. It further aims at finding out whether these Victorian writers are realistic in their presentation of the female characters and what concept of womanhood each of them held in mind while writing their novels.

The study reveals that George Eliot counter-balances both patriarchy and feminism. Unlike the Bronte sisters, George Eliot does not directly address the Women problem.

A close examination of the central female figures in the major novels of Thackeray, the male-female relationships, and women's position in society as it has been portrayed by the writer reveals that Thackeray was as much concerned as his contemporary female novelists about the plight of women and the miserable position they are given in the patriarchal Victorian society, compared with that of men. It also points out that the author had profound knowledge of
the suffering, subjection, and victimization of women at the hands of their oppressors to frequently highlight their miseries and in a variety of ways. One feels that Thackeray was the only writer who could depict the realities of the Victorian society. In this society, according to Thackeray, there is domination and oppression and no place for human passion and love. It is only wealth and social position that all the characters care for. Women, too, in this patriarchal society, have no value and are treated like slaves.

Thackeray was of the opinion that a woman; whatsoever be her goals, good or bad; should be strong enough to survive in this male-dominated society. A large number of women whom Thackeray depicts in his novels are powerful with aspirations and goals to achieve. None of Thackeray's women, however, can be compared with any of those portrayed by either Charlotte or Ann Bronte. In spite of the fact that they are aspirant, gifted, and even domineering, none of them thinks of opposing or challenging the prevalent patriarchal conventions for improving the painful lot of women and help them to lead an independent life away from men's control, or even articulating a wish for changing their own conditions.

Reading Hardy's novels from a Marxist feminist perspective one finds his novels mostly deal with social problems like marriage, gender, sex, class, motherhood, love, chastity, divorce, etc. Also, Hardy was greatly influenced by the feminist movement of the day. Hardy, one concludes, is the only writer who does not only expose the miseries of woman in his patriarchally-dominated society but also expresses his own views which are radical and even
progressive for the Victorians to comprehend and willingly accept. Hardy was also critical of the unjust matrimonial laws which gave more rights to men than to women and of the conventional views of sexuality. Hardy is also the only writer who highlights the worst kind of oppression and abuse meted out by women in the Victorian era.

Through his well-drawn portraits of women, Hardy has shown his disapproval of the conventionally prescribed ideals of depicting female characters. His concept of women is, thus, both complex and unconventional. His women are more energetic and forceful than his men. In many novels Hardy shows men as overwhelmed rather than overwhelming, dominated rather than domineering, reckless in their relationships with their superior women. Take, for instance, William Boldwood and Gabriel Oak in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Jude in *Jude the Obscure*, and many others.

Despite the fact that many of Hardy’s women succeed in achieving their mission in life, many of them prove themselves to be ‘androgynous’ for the rare potentialities that they possess. Some of them also show themselves to be weak and fall victims to human weaknesses. This, in fact, highlights Hardy’s knowledge of the nature of human psyche and proves that he is an expert in the art of character-drawing.

To sum up, the present study shows that all the writers concerned have succeeded in exposing gender-related problems and brilliantly pointed out the inferior position, the subjugation, victimization, and abuse of women at the hands of their male-counterparts in this
patriarchal society. From a Marxist-Feminist point of view, all the six writers are realists as they all, with no exception, portray a life-like world in their novels. They give a realistic picture of the world in their works. They all deal with the social problems that were common in their society like marriage and man-woman relationship within this institution, class conflict, women's education, love, sex, and the miserable position of governesses, etc.

One also finds that all the writers dealt with in this study highlight the plight of the minorities, particularly the children who are mostly ill-treated, neglected and, in some cases, murdered; and some are spoiled and pampered on account of their superior sex. The only case in which a Black has been presented is that of Emily Bronte's Healthcliff, who is believed to be a Negro and who is ill-treated for his inferior position.

Regarding the concept of women, these writers; George Eliot being an exception for none of her gifted and aspirant female protagonists attempt to lead an independent life or possess enough courage or power to resist oppression; share the concept that women should be independent and strong enough to protest against and challenge the prevalent and oppressive patriarchal system of the time and to bring about a change in the painful condition of women in their society. The writers, therefore, presented gifted, aspirant, intellectual and powerful female characters with ambitious desires and objectives. Both Hardy and Thackeray presented domineering women who reflect the concept of womanhood held by their creators. Yet, the writers also portrayed weak women, who are either
oppressed or weak by nature.

The study also shows that Charlotte and Ann Bronte are the writers who consider education as the only solution for women to achieve independence. Also, Charlotte Bronte and William Makepeace Thackeray are those who furnish their texts with highly powerful and feminist passages in which they directly probe the 'Woman Question'. The female protagonists presented by Charlotte and Ann Bronte, unlike those of the other writers, are successful in leading an economically independent life and in marrying husbands of their choice on account of their intellectual superiority which makes them economically independent.

All the writers are concerned with the problems of women for they are initially feminist writers. They all show the influence of feminist movement in one way or the other.
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