Chapter - I

Introduction
WOMEN IN MEREDITH'S NOVELS

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Introduction

Some novelists win immediate popularity by writing to the age in which they lived, by their entertaining ability, intellectual appeal and technical skill. Others, perhaps of equal genius, even pioneers or harbingers of new trends, but due to less felicity, are not so fortunate to get immediate popularity. Still they also may have a claim for a permanent place in literature. George Meredith belongs to the later type of writers. In the delineation of bright and brilliant women in literature, Meredith has been acclaimed as a supreme master. After all these brilliant and radiant women are the product of Meredith's special interest and deliberate purpose. His women seem to be the creation of a reformer's zeal to liberate them from the bondage and servitude in a society dominated by male ego and tyranny. Besides this lofty purpose, it can not be ignored that the romantic halo and the lyrical imagination contribute to the glory of these brilliant heroines.

Meredith is one of those few who sincerely attempted to understand that 'mystery, the human heart female'. He has sung the glorious beauty and the infinite variety of woman with a thousand tongues in his poetry as well as novels. That is the reason why critics are very often carried away by the impression that he was a great admirer of women. In real life this great 'admirer of women' failed to show sympathy to his
destitute and dying wife. He was described as a pioneer in the modern feminine movement and a champion in defence of female freedom.

Many champions of Meredith like Richard Le Gallienne, John Lane, J. A. Hammerton, Travelyan, Lionel Stevenson, J. B. Priestley, Siegfried Sassoon and others had made efforts to popularise George Meredith among the ‘reading public’ during their lifetime but their attempts were not very successful. It is a fact that sincere students of George Meredith are hard to find. If enthusiastic students and critics could not increase the reading public for George Meredith, they are at least keeping interest in Meredith and appreciation of his works in fact. It is a fact that Meredith was acknowledged as a great novelist in the 1890’s. Though some insisted that Meredith’s work was difficult to understand, the admirers argued that he was obscure or difficult only for those who had neither the patience nor sensitivity to understand him. The present study does not claim to be an attempt to popularise Meredith’s work. It is only a sincere attempt to study, to appreciate and to evaluate his novels, with reference to the heroines. At this stage it is necessary to make it clear that it is not a popularising venture but an evaluative endeavour of the novels of the great literary artist. He was, after all, an originator. He wrote in his own way. Like all the great masters, he had his own angle of vision and his own fashion of expression. He had dealt with great themes. The characters in his fiction are personalities, human beings and he does not descend to ponder to lubricity or care for the ‘reading public’. His gallery of portraits of real women, not dolls, would alone place him among the few great novelists in English literature. There were times when he confessed to a very different opinion of his novels and showed himself not without
confidence that by 'exposing and illustrating the natural history of man, he may have helped to pave ways for the firmer footing of those who succeed us.'

Modern novel starts with George Eliot and George Meredith because they introduced certain elements, which became the salient features of the modern novel. George Meredith, the poet, novelist, has displayed the most varied gifts. He had displayed himself in turn poet, storyteller, philosopher, social reformer and a champion who fought for the cause of equality of sexes. In Meredith we have a man who concerns himself with the delicate adjustment of human relationships and yet contrives, before he has finish to quarrel bitterly with his father, his wife and his son. He may possibly have been right or had moved justice on his side. But the melancholy sequence itself is suspicious. There is a man who had made himself the spokesman of a rigid intellectual honesty and sincerity. There is also the pitiless satirist, the unsparing opponent of social vanities, hypocrisies and snobberies who to the very end of his life would seem to have wished to conceal the facts of his life. His path through life was painful enough to colour his views and to trammel his activities. His experience had taught him to endure criticism with indifferent mildness and with the ironic patience. It could neither sour the sweetness of his disposition nor narrow his range of interest. It is a rare occasion to see a man of letters so close to nature. In his writings, there is passion, intellect, fervour, reason, heart and brain working together in order to mark a new epoch in the realm of novel writing. The felicitous union of all these qualities is the secret of his greatness. My aim, here, is to portray the personality of George Meredith and appreciate the work of the harbinger of the modern age. In him one comes across a great genius born before his
time. J. B. Priestley has rightly said, "He escapes from his age so completely that at
times only chronology can assure us."²

George Meredith, born on 12th February 1828, was a son and grandson of naval
outfitters at Portsmouth, where he was born. There was Welsh blood in the family. It
must have irked him that he was the son of a tailor, though his feelings were not crude
snobbishness. Both his grandfather and father was Portsmouth tailor with a taste for life
amongst the upper classes. His grandfather, Melchizedec Meredith, the original great
Mel in the novel ‘Evan Harrington’ mingled with local gentry. His father Augustus,
unfitted for his tailor’s calling, attempted a social feat. Encumbered with his late father’s
debs, Augustus became bankrupt and moved to London to become a Journeyman’s tailor
and declared himself ‘a gentleman’. As a result of which George Meredith inherited a
strangely ambivalent attitude towards the class issue. Mr. S. M. Ellis, one of his
biographers and a member of the same family pointed out with some truth that
Meredith’s early experiences were extremely unhappy. He regarded them only with
bitterness and pain. He had a natural desire to let them remain obscured.

Some records of Meredith’s childhood and boyhood helped one to know that he
was considered proud by other boys in the neighbourhood. At one time he was known as
“Gentle Georgy.” The circumstances of his childhood were not all together favourable to
him and possibly accounted for some of his less admirable traits of character. He was an
only child. His mother died when he was only five. He and his father were never in
sympathy. Merediths were in a curious position, though considered themselves to be
social superior but were not 'gentry'. So that they floated, uneasily in social mid-air as they never knew exactly where they stood. They would naturally be far more sensitive and touchy than other people. As the only child of such a family, George Meredith was brought up in such an atmosphere. He was compelled to spend most of his time either alone or in company of his elders, who would encourage him to regard himself as someone different from the ordinary creature. A great deal of later Meredith can be explained, without making use of a fantastic theory of psychology, in terms of this early upbringing of his. As a child Meredith developed his own resources and began to live in his own world of imagination. It is generally seen that nearly all extremely creative men of genius who later in life, have had the capacity of living intensely with the creatures of their imagination, seem to have been deprived of a normally happy and healthy childhood. George Meredith too compensated himself for the lack of companionship and outward incident by an early life of dreams and fantasies. The most advanced schooling that Meredith ever had was when from the age of fourteen to sixteen he attended a school conducted by the Moravian Brothers at Neuwied. This school was a world by itself. Neuwied, a little town in the most romantic part of the Rhine country, became centre of social progress and culture. The school was founded during the reign of a liberal minded eighteenth century prince who believed in religious tolerance and allowed every religious sect the fullest liberty of thought and worship. Even the course of education offered by the school was excellent and inspiring. The school became famous and attracted pupils from all parts of Western Europe including several noted Englishmen. During these years Meredith imbibed a good deal of German spirit and German influence, especially through the media of poetry and music. The Germany of those years was full of romantic
liberalism and naturalism. It was the time when social service was becoming the ideal of romantic young men. The liberalism had penetrated into theology and free thought was in the air. By getting educated abroad meant that Meredith had an opportunity to escape that 'provincialism' which Matthew Arnold denounced as one of the most glaring faults of the age. Thus the fact that Meredith's stay at Germany, the centre of liberalism, nationalism and religious tolerance partly explains the bent of his mind and the curious way in which he seems to escape his age. It also shaped his mind and determined the course of his thoughts and gave him a certain romanticism that coloured all his works. No matter how purely intellectual, how much in the spirit of pure comedy, the underlying conception of that work might be, it is rather difficult to decide where this influence ends. It is seen even in his love of the fantastic particularly in matters of construction and style, indifferent to form, all of which mark his work both in poetry and fiction. This may have its roots in German influences. Of course, the influence of Jean Paul Richter is apparently seen in his writing. So the years at Neuwied inevitably occupy a prominent place in Meredith's life.

Bereft of maternal love Meredith was tended by his aunts especially by Louisa. It is said that to her, he was indebted for his manners and his courteous bearing towards women. Gradually in later years Louisa became a personification of 'social falsity' and 'personal unscrupulousness' and she appears as the Countess de Salder in 'Evan Harrington'. The next woman in his life was Mary Nicolls, the daughter of Thomas Love Peacock and the widow of Nicolls. Meredith had just returned from Neuwied bubbling with German romanticism and idealism. He found Mary as a living example of all he
cherished desires. Meredith's relationship with Peacock's family, in particular must always be considered as a moral preoccupation of the content of his novels. It is clearly reflected through his ways of writing. His relationship began at the age of twenty when he was a lawyer's clerk and yet had not tried his hands in writing. He met Thomas Love Peacock's son who too was the member of a literary circle. They contributed to a hand-written 'Monthly Journal' through which Meredith received some publicity. Mary Ellen Nicolls, the widowed sister also contributed to the same. She was a witty and beautiful woman. Meredith and she had much in common. They were married in August 1849 and soon left for a honeymoon on the continent. As Sassoon stated, 'Unquestionably she was a bewitching apparition for young Meredith and her charms have been immortalised by him in prose and words, seldom, if ever surpassed, as illuminations of the rapture of first love.'

"Sweet, for she is what my heart first awaking,\nWhispered the world was; morning light is she."

The same image of the 'white water-lily' or 'bursting out of bud in heavens of the streams' persists in Lucy Desborough in 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel' and Clara Middleton in 'The Egoist' and in varying shades in all his novels.

Meredith's marriage brought him closer to Thomas Love Peacock. Despite the temperamental incompatibility, Peacock's literary outlook impressed Meredith. Soon he advanced on Peacock. In that his characters were never merely the mouthpieces of his ideas. The projected clearly individualised temperaments. They learnt from experience
and grew in self-awareness. There are, of course, traces of Peacock himself in some of Meredith's characters particularly the famous Dr. Middleton in The Ordeal of Richard Feveral. It is not however as a character to be portrayed but as literary influence that Peacock is important in Meredith's life. It was the intellectual comedy, which attracted young romantic poet. Meredith's "Essay on Comedy" shows that he had made a close study of the subject and fiction of Peacock. From the beginning, there is a determination to fuse romantic narrative with high comedy, which is clearly seen from Meredith's writings. Peacock himself was a notable servant of Comic Spirit and an enthusiastic student of Comedy in all its forms, particularly Greek Comedy. Meredith admired Peacock's Comic novels. It would be impossible for so young and impressionable a man to be in close contact with a forceful personality like Peacock and not be influenced by his point of view and opinions. Meredith's long service to the Comic Spirit, to whom he had dedicated a richer mind and a greater genius than Peacock. The marriage with the daughter may have been a disaster to Meredith the man, but the association with the father was undoubtedly a Godsend to Meredith the writer.

Meredith's hasty marriage with Mary Peacock, who was seven years senior to him, was 'a union of physical passion but it had long been apparent that he was married to the wrong woman.' In 1858, seven years after their marriage Mary went away with Henry Wallis, the painter, leaving Meredith and she returned next year with a baby. Though she wanted reconciliation with Meredith, he never allowed her and probably never saw her till she died in 1861. The result of this excruciating and lacerating experience resulted in his masterpiece, 'Modern Love'; one of his greatest poems, in
Sorrow and suffering are recorded with a power that Shakespeare’s sonnets, none surpass. This poem is the testament of his unhappiness, awarding the woman had loved the cold comfort of immortality in a poetic masterpiece. One day referring to this period, George Meredith expressed himself thus to Mr. Clodd, “No sun warmed my roof-tree; the marriage was a blunder, she nine years my senior...” Thus the blessed state was a short-lived. ‘Pure from the night and splendid for the day’, his romantic and colourful dream was to be shattered very shortly. The marriage was doomed from the outset. Both husband and wife were of the same kind brilliant, ambitious, highly stung, uncompromising, bitter-tongued so that there was no point of rest between them, no mutual adjustment of wills and purpose.

Meredith came out of this ordeal matured, purified by grief, with a fund of indulgence and pity towards women whom he considered ‘defenceless victims’. Neither Mary Ellen’s departure nor her death was for Meredith the end of the relationship. It dominated the rest of his life. It haunted him with the images of her misery and her inflexibility. If Meredith’s pride would not allow him to admit publicly any blame for the failure of his marriage, his conscience nagged him. It is the guilty conscience, which owes the series of relationships between the sexes in successive novels. In the novels the man more clearly becomes the unfeeling tyrant and the woman the potential victim. Thus Meredith’s view of the relationship of sexes as symbolic of the wider relationship between freedom and tyranny of custom led him far from the real-life of his preoccupation.
After this experience Meredith the poet opened his heart when Meredith the man 
pressed his lips. The tragedy of marriage compelled him to search his memory and 
find. The man himself did not come out of this disastrous affair too well, for he showed 
himself somewhat cold in the face of suffering and sorrow. His pride would not allow 
him to speak the forgiving world and make the generous gesture. But the poet in him 
could not be made a party to this conspiracy of cold silence and so he traces the course of 
tragedy that shows not an erring wife and a wronged husband, but simply two unhappy 
lovers inevitably drifting apart. It has been seen that after the catastrophe, Meredith 
levelled the sharp arrows of his wit against the creature women. But whatever the man 
might say, the writer certainly took up a very different attitude. Meredith in his work may 
have missed many opportunities, but he never afterwards missed an opportunity of 
championing a woman and the arrows of his wit can be seen transfixing complacent, 
tyrannical and egotistical males.

A detailed study of Meredith's works reveals various shades of women. Out of 
which two shades of woman i.e. the lovely, radiant and idyllic lass depicted in 'Love in 
the Valley' and the unfaithful, tragic partner in 'Modern Love' whose original can be 
found in his own life. The shadows of these images can be traced in all his novels. These 
two images of a woman cannot be easily dismissed as two way-ward characters on the 
highway of his creative imagination. They seem to be the two sides of the same coin. 
These two images continuously struggle for supremacy in the poet's conceptual and 
creative world. His experiences of life are in constant clash with his idealistic vision. No 
doubt that the former image of a woman is victorious in this struggle pushing the later
background. This image of unfaithful and tragic partner appears as Lady Feverel, a novel ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’ who runs away leaving the husband and the family behind. After the desertion and death of Mary, Meredith became very much haterred but the crisis and the consequent survival of Meredith’s faith in woman has to be prob. Despite this disastrous experience, Meredith became more convinced about the nobility of female species. Different critics have tried to explain this differently. Sassoon explains this as an imaginative compulsion for what he had endured with his wife. Jack Lindsey attributes this to the social factors. But the reality lies in the very attitude Meredith had towards woman. No doubt that for a long time these two images of a woman struggled for supremacy and ultimately the former became victorious. In his letter written to Augustus Jessopp Meredith writes, “If novels and poems are to be written for young women only, I suppose I must learn the art afresh and make a new beginning.” Meredith achieved what proved something like a perfect union when he married Marie Vulliamy, who came from an old Huguenot family settled in Surrey.

(New Addition: The portraits of women in Meredith’s novels are unparalleled. It was human life that Meredith cared for. His novels are full of gayest fancy, the intellectual comedy, the most piercing wit, strongest passion, and the deepest pathos and above all there is a zeal of a reformer. He wanted to bring the reformation in the relationship between man and woman. He focussed his attention upon the status of women in the prevailing society. He is one of the earliest reformers who dreamt of a society where men and women could stand on an equal footage enjoying the individual liberty. In order to turn this dream into reality Meredith has put greater responsibility
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He strongly believed that there is a kind of a strong bond between Nature and men. With the help of this strength a woman can perform the great responsibility of creation and continuation of species on this earth. With this belief, Meredith has sketched strong portraits of women in all of his novels.

This gallery of women portraits is just superb. After Shakespeare no other writer has so well portrayed the infinite variety of woman. As Shakespearean heroin dazzle with different shade and colours, Meredith’s heroines also are radiant. He endlessly talks about their graces, beauty, virtue, and also frailty and inconsistency. His women represent almost every conceivable type. Each character is invariably true to type. It is a faithful portrait drawn from life. There is no other English novelist during Victorian period who has created such a glorious company of beautiful, noble and fearless women. They are a source of joy and inspiration in their full-blooded strength and pride of body and soul. There is Clara Middleton at their head, young and beautiful but ignorant of the world around her in the beginning, but learns the ways of the world as well as her mind too. She is courageous enough to choose between the right and wrong. She is rightly called as the ‘dainty rogue in porcelain’. There is Latitia Dale equally beautiful, well educated ignorant. She is the egoists first lady love and Constantia Durham is the second. The former has ‘a romantic tale on her eyelashes, the latter is a ‘racing cutter’. There is Rose, who is gentle and quiet, but strong enough to bear the beloved’s shame. Otilia is grave and wise and beautiful too. While Lucy Desborough, the most beautiful of all, with her fair singlets framing her face on the river’s bank. Richard is madly fall in love with her. Richard and Lucy, without the knowledge, and against all the efforts of his
"Ferdinand and Miranda", perfect man and woman, regaining Eden for
Lucy is the right girl", she is Cinderella that Richard by instinct.

Meredith has created two sisters — Dahlia and Rhoda who stand exactly opposite.
The single mindedness of Rhoda is offered as a sign of a necessary strength of will and
conduct, while Dahlia is poor and weak-willed. The character of Rhoda is sketched so
well that the reader forms the conviction that even a small number of women such as
Rhoda, trained and educated in a better environment can bring about a reformation.

Equally great is Carinthia Jane, the wife wedded in mockery, who bears bravely
with the shame and learns to live by sufferings. She lives and breathes and looks
wistfully beautiful from the very first. When she gives her heart to the brilliant young
lad. She is portrayed as an extremely spirited girl.

However, the writer's mastery to reach the extreme corners of woman's heart can
clearly be seen in his portrait of Nataly the mother and Nesta the daughter. Nataly the
slave of existing conventions because after all she is the product of artificial society while
the daughter stands exactly opposite to the mother. Nataly was 'revolutionary' enough to
live illegally with Victor Radnor, but was not assertive enough to continue the traditional
role of woman as a slave. Nesta on the other hand has been created as an independent
character who stands for heartiness of affection and love of right.
next in the series is Diana Merion, the most witty, sparkling young and
too. George Meredith seems to have taken special efforts to represent Diana
throughout as one of the most attractive of young Irishwomen. She is intelligent, quick-
itted and the most puzzling. She is described as a bright, dark-eyed, gloriously
beautiful, and brilliantly clever girl. She ‘quickened every sense of life’, in those around
her by her laughter and her ‘delicious chatter’.

While the novel ‘Beauchamp’s Career’ offers wonderful portraits of four heroines
character. Who are sketched with various shades but the ultimate aim of their life is the
same. Though they exist on different planes but there is one common failure which bind
them together. They are the bound together in the bonds of an artificial and conventional
society. There is Rosamund Culling much elderly woman who is completely devoted to
the interest and betterment of Nevil the hero. Cecilia Halkett is a very beautiful and
extremely girl, but Nevil is passionately in love with a charming French girl, Renee. It is
Jenny Denham who is described as a girl having strong head and will causes surprises to
those who come across her by her remarkably strong intellectual powers and her high
courage.

In the same way there is Vittoria, Emilia and many more, who have been sketched
with a definite purpose. Each one of them exists on her own plane, fighting her own
battle life. They are bold, and beautiful, but not always perfect. They too become the
victims sometimes in the hands of destiny or circumstance. Sometimes they are
In their own traps. Still they are different because they have the capacity to
they are capable enough to hold themselves up and change the circumstances.

A detailed study of his novels brings us to the conclusion that his heroines have
been criticised heavily. Such kind of delineation of heroines had never been done by the
previous writers. The secret lies in his manner of presentation. He presents his women
as definite individualities, clearly marked characters and takes the greatest care to show
us the spring of their action. At the same time, having described the character, he leaves
the lovely face and figure, misty and vague. He gives them a kind of aura, makes them
move in golden mist, shows slimming figures in which every man sees his own Helen of
Troy. The poet in him, contenting himself with hinting at this and that touch of beauty
bathes his women in glamour. So it is this combination of definite individuality with
poetic glamour that is the secret of Meredith's heroines. Shakespeare's heroines too have
precisely the same appeal. Cleopatra, Rosalind, Imogene and the others are distinct
characters who are known for beauty and witchery. All Meredith's psychological
richness acuteness would be of little avail if he too had not been able to create his
atmosphere, to bathe his women in light and make them move to music. His task is to
obliterate the old easy sentimentalities of the sexual relation, to approach it intellectually
and make of it something finer and more honest. It compels us to think and not merely to
feel about it. While he gives us more intellect in the matter, he also gives us more poetry
and nothing is lost but the whole is raised to higher power. His heroines walk in light and
music and loveliness.)
George Meredith was born in the middle of the Nineteenth Century and naturally wrote for the Victorian public. But he shared very little of their temperament and mental set up. The Victorian age is one of the most remarkable periods in the history of England. By this time, the task of a novelist had become very complicated. The novel being a popular medium of expression sought to do society in the age, precisely what Sir Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin sought to do for science. The science of psychology had been initiated and surprisingly it was initiated by men of letters rather than the men of science. The writers were absorbed to find the truth and to show how it might be used to uplift humanity. They had started probing much deeper into the psychology of characters than merely narrating the stories and events. In this process of metamorphism from simple to super subtle Meredith did a great job. He changed the form of depiction from the ordinary characters of the most artificial society to the real one. He too was influenced by the scientific discoveries and industrialisation but like other writers of the day he neither got carried away nor was he afraid of the mechanical results of the modern science. He very boldly set out to expand the science of human life in many volumes. And if the science of human life is the apex of all sciences, the novelist is suddenly placed at the top in the literary hierarchy. Such new concept of novel was first conceived and explicitly enunciated by Meredith himself. This was his manifesto to the fiction world. He wrote novels with a purpose. With the new fields of exploration, there came, too much experimentation in narrative method. Unlike his contemporaries, Dickens and Thackeray, his literary career did not represent a steady progression from the old to the new. Through his novels he explored the unscanned recesses of the human mind. At the same time, he did not waver from his initial appeal to the conscious mind and he
invariably judged man's darkest actions in the daylight that permit conscious choice. He aimed to make the novel, the highest, truest form of life. No man ever attained a more perfect unity of thought and deed. In his works there is a complete consistency of theory and practice. Mrs. Strunge Henderson in her interesting book on Meredith lying stress on these qualities says, "for the genius of his work lies not in his artistic perfection, nor even in its intellectual subtlety but rather in its original outline and conception."\(^6\)

Right from the beginning Meredith was given to experimentation. He tried his level best to bend the narrative form to his wish. Though he was interested in the mental turmoil of his characters, he continued to resort to dots to indicate that a mind had deserted the realm of thought and entered that of the loose association of images. Some of his most effective scenes are ultra traditional and hence the readers find both novelty and subtlety in them. On the other hand the analysis of his characters helped in the growth of the psychological novel. The conventional reviewers were highly disturbed because of his first novel, which did not at all conform to establish pattern. He was very much aware of the hypocrisy and false complacency in which the Mid-Victorian society was steeped. With his Irish family background and his Neuwied education Meredith was the last to breathe freely and comfortably in such a suffocating climate of the lifeless tradition and shallow feudal conventions. His intellectual make-up coupled with his experiences of life equipped him to formulate a philosophy of life. It becomes essential for a student of Meredith in general and for the present study in particular, to understand this philosophy. In this philosophy he has entrusted a very dominant role to woman in his 'world-view'. In his letter to Hugh W. Strong on January 1905, Meredith says,
“Since I began to reflect I have been opposed by the injustice done to women. The constraints put upon their natural aptitudes and their faculties, generally much to the degradation of the race. A deeper interest in their enfranchisement and development, being assured that women of the independent mind are needed for any sensible degree of progress.”

Meredith was too individualistic to belong to any group and to intellectual to be understood by all. His personal traits helped him to evolve a new style of his own. He had at once usually fine vigorous intellect and teeming imagination. His very remarkable keenness of insight and philosophical perception of humanity, his deeply poetic mind his perfect humour and his knowledge and love for nature is apparent to all. From his poetry as well as novels it can be witnessed that Meredith had accepted the latest trends of science. He welcomed whatever knowledge came his way. Because of this he had been heavily criticised than any other writer of his age. He had been reproved through entire misunderstanding of his intentions and of the very nature of his fiction. The fact is that he always endeavoured to enlarge the boundaries of the art. He tried certain new methods and dropped certain old ones. For this reason he was always criticised. The Meredithian novel might with a little license be described as a synthesis of Richardson and Fielding, the intuitive process and intellectual process of summarising life and interpreting and judging characters. “It can be also seen as a synthesis of Jane Austen and Peacock with something of Lamb, the freakish and imaginative essayist, of Carlyle, the prophet and teacher, a dash of Congreve and a stronger infusion of Moliere”. He is a storyteller and analyst of character, interpreter of motive, serious spectator and
commentator, all at the same time. He is an ironic observer of human comedy, who also maintained that the novel had a social purpose. He put forward a treatise of human life from which lessons of much practical value were to be gained. He seemed careless of everything that the orthodox novelist considers most important. On the other hand he wanted his readers to be prepared to read his novels in an unorthodox way. He was a novelist, a thinker, a critic, a teacher, and a prophet. He tried like Aristophanes, in blending the poetry and the comedy of real life into such a harmony that they could no longer be held antagonistic. He prepared himself to discard many old fashioned regulations.

Meredith made his art more mobile, more fluid. He bent and twisted the form to suit his own purposes. Through his novels he presented us with a world radically different from those of contemporary novelists. The world created by him was bathed in a dry intellectual light occasionally coloured by outburst of romantic sympathy, of almost lyrical ecstasy. It was a world of romantic comedy in which the common substance of fiction, life, revealed to an ordinary observer and described by a reporter. In order to give this Meredith had to adopt a new method of story telling.

Meredith’s literary qualities must always be considered in the light of the Celtic side of his temperament and peculiarities of his mental equipment. His mental processes were abrupt and far-reaching. The suppression of connecting association frequently gives his language an air of obscurity. He differed from the conventional writers of the day in various ways. While the ordinary method is to relate what happens form the point of
view of the onlooker, Meredith frequently describes it from the point of the emotion of
the actors. His influence in this direction has largely modified the art of fiction. Herein
lies the secret of peculiar brilliancy of his style, derived from his combination of the
narrator with the creator. Moreover Meredith's instinct for psychology is so intimate and
his sense of motive and action so true that the interaction of characters directly dominates
the sequence of events. It discloses the moral idea or criticism of life. Simplicity can
scarcely be expected of his language for the interplay of ideas is in itself original and
complex too. When Meredith is at his best, he is only evolved with the involution of his
subject. The aphorisms that decorate his style are simple when the idea they convey is
simple. His style is much finer and subtler instrument that at first appears and must be
judged finally by what it conveys to the mind.

Meredith was after all an originator, and at first suffered in estimation on that
score. He wrote in his own way as a result of which his writing became highly
individualistic. Meredith's philosophy represents his criticism of life. Broadly speaking
it is a belief in the rightness and wholesomeness of Nature. When Nature - 'Sacred
Reality' is to be lovingly and faithfully sought and known by the pure use of reason, man
must be 'Obedient to Nature; not her slave.' This philosophy occasionally becomes
mystic and yet is an inspiring one austere and practical. His politics may be summed up
as striving after liberty for reason and conscience and constant progress of humanity.
Conformity with Nature is the means by which man attains a healthy, intelligent and
cheerful life and saves himself from error. Meredith talked the same doctrine, which he
blended with the creed of evolution and developed into a general philosophy. The theory
of Comic is a corollary. Meredith shared Peacock's enthusiasm for Aristophanes, who received his due in the Essay on Comedy together with Moliere. He was in full agreement with Peacock on the rights of women to equal intellectual development, to freedom and a place of their own in the social scheme. His heroines Clara Middleton, Vittoria, Cecilia Halkett, Diana and Carinthia have the strength to stand-alone and break opposition with the self-resolution. In Meredith the coalition of personal thought and life in works, is at a higher potential. Like Hardy, a little later, he sought to universalise the fiction, according to dramatic formula, taking a predominantly comic view of the world.

Several times in his letters Meredith protested that his real business in life was poetry and then he wrote fiction for living. The protest must be accepted with some reverse, especially as there are times when he confessed to very different opinions of his novels. In both his poetry and fiction Meredith tried to show what the theory of evolution means to the individual and the race. Hence there is nothing strange in the fact that his novels are the consequent of the theory of evolution. He was a great and critical reader and not likely to overlook anything worth learning from precursors or contemporaries. In his novels one finds searching imagination, beauty, rapture, despair, the occult working of the tortured heart and the bitter irony of the Comic Spirit.

Meredith was always a person of abounding energy and vitality. He loved and was loved by his friends. He was an ardent votary of the open air with a love of nature. In course of time the love of nature became philosophical and out of the simple paganism he evolved a religion of nature. His friendships were based on intellectual affinities. He
was different from Wordsworth in his attitude to life and the poetic style. When Meredith looked at nature he was not content to dwell on her visible beauties, he sought her inner being. He tried to discern her purpose or at least the direction of her striving. For all his intellectualism, he was staunchly a romantic in his heart. His theory of nature will be analysed in detail in the second chapter.

Meredith’s ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’, exactly contemporary with Darwin’s ‘The Origin of Species’ mirrors clearly his modern attitude to science. Its appearance marks the arrival of Meredith, the novelist and social philosopher. Though Sir Austen Feverel’s scheme for his son’s education breaks down through its omission of certain human factors, the corrective satire is in the interest of science. In the later novels such as ‘Evan Harrington’, ‘Diana of the Crossways’, ‘One of Our Conquerors’ Meredith had made the application of scientific ideas to the conduct of life. Meredith’s contemporaries, Tennyson and Browning too had endeavoured to keep up with contemporary science but its relation and particularly the evidences of evolution gave such a shock to their fixed conviction that they could never recover a balance. On the other hand Meredith tried to bring the new knowledge into the general scheme of things. He aimed to find an altruistic religion reconciling scientific thought with human idealism. He strongly believed that no religion can be valid that rejects knowledge. One may fail to arrive at truth but he must at any rate strive towards it. Meredith accepted evolution as a hypothesis that casts floods of light on human history. He enabled man to organise his life for attainable ends providing a basis for morality. He was not a metaphysician. His cosmology is a bold speculation on the facts of existence, confirmed by what he felt to be
his truly filial communion with Nature. Meredith simply thought of the general process of evolution, without considering its ultimate causes when he invited us to behold Nature gazing on “her great venture, Man.” He prayed that her offering might rise victorious above the lusts and terrors and distrusts, which hold him down. Meredith’s confidence is rooted in his warm sense of reality. The solidarity of his fellowship is with earth. His faith is far more moving and appealing. It is the faith that doesn’t question but accepts the good that is granted.

Such violent insurgency was a natural reaction against Victorian cherishing of the dead bones instead of the live spirit of religion. But Meredith was not a Victorian enough to be excited by these controversies. The mildness of soul and free thinker of the Moravians of Neuwied had taught him to be hostile to no one. Thus he stood serenely aloof from the savage conflicts and mutual denunciations of churchman and infidel, theist and atheist. He was a romanticist but his faith was illumined by the teaching of science.

Meredith, the modern poet and novelist could look deeper into the life of both man and nature. From nature’s parental dealings with man and from the success of those who ‘devoutly serve’, Meredith reduces the laws of man’s life. His social doctrines are corollaries of his view of nature. His ethics were complementary to his sociology. With him the fiction and poetry are felt to be somewhat complementary to each other. For him the poems and the novels are two different but harmonious expressions of the same mind and the same imaginative view of the world. His poetry flowed over into his fiction. His novels apply imaginative thought to the relation between ideals and life but in a more
systematic fashion and with ampler knowledge. He felt that fiction is to have a practical aim. It is to be an instrument of the effort to raise humanity. He said, “We must have poetry to hallow this and other forms of energy... Better say life is holy.” His novel is half poetry and claims the privileges of poetry. It continuously transcends prose cannons and rises into the upper region of poetic drama. His outstanding characters are more complex beings, more cultivated and intellectual, more sensitive and impassioned than common human beings. They are the dramatic personae of poetic comedy.

It will not be an exaggeration if it is said that Meredith gave a new turn to fiction. He contrived to press the novel into his service. When he produced ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’ the English novel had been put to various uses. It was twisted this way and that way by writers such as Scott, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray and the Bronte’s who for the first time successfully carried away the real world into the atmosphere of wild romance. But Meredith’s aims were different from those of his fellow novelists. He brought to the art a mind that seems curiously unfitted for it. He was highly poetical, deeply philosophical and critical towards life. He fashioned a new form for itself. The comedy that he embodied in his fiction contains all the elements of the finest intellectual comedy for the stage. The poet in him sought relief in the fiction too, with the result that the comedy was blended with pure romance. It ultimately rose to a lyrical ecstasy that has never been approached by any novelist before or since. No doubt influenced by contemporary novelists, who shared with their public a taste for huge narratives, Meredith had so far flung himself into stories that covered stretches of time, many changes of place and involved a large number of minor characters. He shows us a picture
that has in it no middle distance. Either his people are seen as little puppets illuminated by lightening flashes of wit or the readers are taken inside their minds. Compare to other novelist, his world is revealed to us either by sudden glimpses through a camera or X-ray, but never by common sight. That's why his novels seem so brittle, abstract and unreal to so many readers. They seem to have less connection with time and place than any novels of his century.

Meredith was pre-eminently a writer who had the virtues of his defects and defects of his virtues. They follow closely on one another's heels. When we analyse various aspects such as characterisation, descriptive power, wit and humour, a contradiction is apparent both his strength and weakness too. He was a great narrative artist. The bulk of his characters (that is practically all the secondary figures) are mere names and dialogue and nothing more. Yet he has given us some of the greatest figures in fiction particularly his heroines inferior to none but Shakespeare's. In fiction the creation of real heroines is considered as a difficult task but Meredith has done it in a magnificent and an apparent ease. Inspite of the weaknesses and faults Meredith's greatest triumph in the creation of characters is his heroines who have been even now analysed and appreciated. His are the most enchanting ladies in the world of literature. A rapturous praise of their characters exists in great quantity in all his novels. An account of the part they play in the comedy will be given in detail in the third chapter, which deals with his concept of Comic Spirit. Meredith's heroines have a double function; just as he himself appears in his fiction, in double capacity. The poet in Meredith sees in them glowing images of health and beauty. They are the fruits of right
living, lovely and loving symbols of earth. The critic in him uses them as a kind of test. This gives them quite a strong position, which is totally different form that they occupy in other fiction.

A close study of Meredith's characters brings to notice that most of them have not been placed in Victorian England. They are observed by a man of extensive literary learning and of very pronounced convictions about man's sensual-ascetic nature, his egoism, and his proneness, from lack of wisdom to inflict sorrow. Much casual notation has been made of his indebtedness to such diverse writers as Ariosto, Shakespeare, Richter, Goethe and Herbert Spencer. There are incidental resemblances to the works of almost any previous comic dramatist of stature. Meredith was very much a product of literary history, that he reflected in his own writing the motives and situations, which he liked in his reading. Though his writing is influenced by his wide range of reading but his themes are concerned with the current issues and attitude. From his writings it appears that his convictions themselves were as much based on his study of his own time, as they were preconceptions with which he approached to it.

Meredith was not interested in giving a panoramic sketch of all the social ranks of Victorian England. That does not mean he was indifferent to everything about which he did not write. He accepted as his province the aristocracy and the upper middle class because he found in them an ample range. Only in a few novels he tried a different scene. It was not that a labourer's wife would have a less poignant sorrow than Lucy Feverel would. Nor that a man going frequently to pubs would undergo a less tragic-
comic suffering than the famous Alvan. But Meredith was highly concerned with those ills in society, which comedy might correct by laughter. After all the behaviour and the manner of the people was the result of artificial civilisation. When those tragic ills which when found in person of prestige and high stature brought harm not alone to the protagonist and his family but eventually to the masses. Moreover, despite his comic exposure of snobbery and of the foolish vulgarity that could accompany rank and wealth. Meredith followed Goethe, and many others in believing that leisure to read books and freedom from the burden of hard physical toil could increase the subtlety of personality. As it is indicated in his “Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit”\(^8\) he was writing for the cultivated readers. Though he deplored the limitations of English culture, he expected to find his readers mainly in the leisure classes. His comedy would therefore be more pertinent if directed at the veiled shortcomings of his audience. As to his tragic scenes, it is likely that in writing mainly of the upper society he was also influenced by a tradition that went back to Aeschylus. In fact, only in a civilisation, which was the main descent could Meredith’s most admirable characters obtained an audience. But as writer, whether comic or tragic in end, the novelist was preoccupied with the ways in which civilisation went astray. He found the substance for pity and also for corrective comedy in the incongruities that resulted from its erring.

J. S. Mill in his ‘The Subscription of Women’, 1869, had declared his protest against the British government for accepting the then prevailing social condition with the assumption that they must be good. George Meredith too was influenced by the same thought and protested against the social conditions, which were so unhealthy for the
development of weaker sections particularly the women in society. He believed that the actual economic order and the social habits related to it were disordered. The outworn beliefs and modes of conduct were the result of creating an aura sentiment. This social condition has been sketched very effectively in almost all the novels by Meredith. Even the characters steeped in deep sentiment are the products of his skilful observation. For example, the complete Patterne household portrayed in his famous novel 'The Egoist' is enveloped in sentiment. Even those conditions on, which English economic survival depended, were likely to be accepted dishonestly. One reaped the profits of trade while despising their sources. Thus young Rose Jocelyn in 'Evan Harrington' speaks admirably to ships, but scornfully of the trade, which floats them. She is not to be blamed completely because she hardly knows about the trade. But she naively reflects the prejudices among which she had been reared. Nineteenth Century English aristocracy, as Meredith saw it, tended to be feudal in sentiment, lethargic to political reform and as feudal as possible in economic practices. Rich land and mine owners as sketched in the form of Sir Willoughby in 'The Egoist' and Lord Fleetwood in 'The Amazing Marriage' set themselves up as medieval barons although the function of a baronage had been lost. The upper classes held fast to their heritage with its patronage and its freedom to be idle. In foreign affairs the hypocrisy expressed itself as expletive imperialism disguised as humanitarianism. That is the reason why so kindly a man like Edward Romfrey who is sympathised towards the child labourers can speak of Negroes as commodity and is assumed by him, when the British labourers not kept under feudal patronage, is the natural opponent of his employer. Thus Meredith's keen interest in the prevailing social conditions and his minute observation of men and manners makes his
writing more realistic and effective. It is definitely not just the creation of a romantic mind but the result of a reformer's zeal. His capacity to understand and feel for the severity of the social problems of the day is simply amazing. It is this quality of his writing which makes him stand apart from his contemporaries.

Though a radical in mind, Meredith never expected any sudden reversal of attitude by either the landowners or the owners of the mercantile enterprises. He declined to construct a paragon of labourers for contrast between the idle Lord Fleetwood and his poor employees who accept a feudal relationship with their economic masters. What he took for study was the working of minds, which held fast to rank and wealth but gained no security from it. Their unrest caused others as well as to them suffering. Like Sir Willoughby who loftily commits the most exquisite tyrannical cruelty while glamorising himself as a benevolent fairy tale prince.

Of all the evils social and economic customs existing in Victorian Era, it was the tradition of marriage, which made Meredith seriously restless. A marriage should be a communion of true minds in quest of mutual inspiration. It should provide a harmony not only to the individual but also at the social level. But unfortunately in those days it was an uncouth compromise between desire for money and concern for social ranks. It was a kind of a bargain not only at an individual level but also at a social level. Meredith tried to put before society the evils of the then existing marriage institution. He tried to preach the people about the weakness and drawback of this institute by making a detailed analysis of it. And that is the reason why 'Marriage for Money' is a common theme
found in all of his novels. Like a true scientist he tried to reach at the bottom of this evil tradition and tried to find a solution. The remedies found by him are quite shocking.

Marriage for money is common place in the world of Meredith’s novels. In one of the earliest novels ‘Adventure of Harry Richmond’, the young Harry accepts, as Rosy does, the sentiment of his time, approves of his father’s attempt to marry a naïve woman merely to secure his wealth. Though the evils of the materialistic alliance are most tragically revealed in the French society, it wrecks the happiness of Renee, and other loveless marriage in ‘Beauchamp’s Career’. Even in other novels such as ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’ ‘One of our Conquerors’ and ‘The Amazing Marriage’, we find the bitter results of the concern for feudal rank and for money.

Thus in the Victorian Age marriage was preserved as a feudal tradition. In the society where wealth was inherited and not earned, the stultification of intellect was serious for husband and it was deadly for wife. Men having a large property at their disposal did not often do any useful work. They could occupy themselves with the management of their estates or might pursue some gentlemanly profession for their satisfaction. Women on the contrary were denied any profession. They were without exception bound to a life of idleness. They had to keep themselves occupied with such substitute activity where there was no way to express their talents. Even the management of a woman’s money was considered the proper business of a man unless she was an Amazonian independent. As it is effectively analysed in the novel ‘Beauchamp’s Career’, where Colonel Halkett thinks that he must supply Cecilia, his daughter, with a
husband because only a man, he assumes can look after her wealth. She has been trained for a ‘beautiful servicelessness’ as quoted by Beauchamp himself.

The imaginative calculation, which fostered the combining of income with family prestige, was timidly concealed by a faint haze of sentiment. There is an instance in ‘Diana of the Crossways’ when Dacier and Constance Asper marry, that society, the novelist tell us is ‘Oriental’ in magnifying the holiness of the occasion. It makes Constance a member of Dacier’s oriental harem. Yet society is only glorifying the climax of a pattern designed by the two families, who, despite the temporary wayward independence of Dacier, have brought pressure for the marriage as relentlessly as if the two had been betrothed at birth.

Meredith never ignored the importance of money for persons accustomed to a prosperous standard of culture. At the same time he never expected that all women should have the courage of Aminta to cast aside necklaces and bracelets and join a poor schoolmaster in an adventure. Though he was thoroughly disillusioned and knew it very well that the existing circumstances would not change within a night yet he was hopeful of effective gradual changes from within. Meredith has given extensive portraits of the cultural and recreational activities of the upper classes. In drawing the uncouthness, whimsicality and comic incongruities, he reminds one of a tradition, which includes Shakespeare, Fielding, Dickens, Peacock and Moliere.
Meredith's gentleman is ordinarily trained for no useful occupation. He believed in the fact that the Englishman was self-conscious in drawing-room conversation with women. He had a little taste in art, music and literature. Meredith left no stone unturned to expose the pretence with, which he disguised lack of urbanity. Though the novelist himself had a keen interest in all the worldly matters, some of his men sometimes linger at the dinner table merely because they are at a loss when they join the ladies. As in case of Warder Devereux in 'Beauchamp's career' who is so little able to discuss ideas with the women that he makes a refuge in his pipe. When he dies his wife is named as 'the widow of tobacco ash'. Though scholarly and professional work does get done and some of the better characters are scholars or barrister too, but most of his men are good for nothing. Following an animal cycle in the sating of his instincts, he is often, in middle age, the victim of his earlier physical appetite. Instead of pruning them away, he has usually intensified the excesses in whim and mood. At best he may be a patronising scholar, a poet or a dabbling in science. At worst he is a parasite, spinning out a bored existence. He has lost the earlier English spirit of fun. The writer is more disillusioned to see his refusal to exert himself to achieve an interesting personality. On the contrary, for Meredith, a cultivated man was one prepared to take his part in social affair. The novelist has indeed used his favourite metaphor to characterise an ideal meeting of minds of the two sexes.

The next issue, which the novelist earnestly tried to put forward, was the education of women and their position in social life. He believed in the fact that women were unable to stand on an equal footage with men unless they could she enjoy the
educational facility. It is the magic of education that would help women win their deserving position in this male-dominated society. Keeping this noble thought in mind Meredith has discussed the issue of education of women through all the possible ways in his novels. Particularly the novels like ‘Rhoda Fleming’, ‘Lord Ormont and his Aminta’, and ‘Amazing Marriage’ seriously deal with the same issue. In ‘Lord Ormont and his Aminta’, Mr. Wayburn expresses his views upon the essence of a quality education and the contribution of a good teacher in the existing social set up. Of course, it is Meredith who has used Wayburn as his mouthpiece and openly declared the need of a good teacher and a healthy education system for the better growth of the future generation. Mr. Wayburn says, “Society offers an example that your conjecture is not unfounded, Lady Ormont. But if we have great literature and an interest in the world’s affairs, can there be any fear of it? The schoolmaster ploughs to make them, join with them in their games, accustomed them to have their heads knocked with what he wants to get into them, leading them all the while, as the bigger school-fellow does, if he is a good fellow. He has to be careful not to smell of his office. Doing positive good is the business of his everyday- on a small scale but it is positive, if he likes his boys. Avaunt favouritism! – he must like all boys. And it is human nature not so far removed from the dog; only it’s a supple human nature; there is the beauty of it. We train it. Nothing is more certain that that it grows upward. I have the belief that I shall succeed because I like boys and they like me. It always was the case.”

Meredith has very boldly proclaimed that only the healthy education can demolish the big barriers between the two sexes. If a child, girl or boy is brought in a healthy
atmosphere, free from any kind of false pretence, he or she may be able to choose between the right and wrong. It is this skill of choosing the right at the right moment may lead them to the natural ways of life. Ultimately, this will create a conducive atmosphere for the better growth of not only this generation but for generations to come. That is how the noble task of Nature, which is bestowed upon a man will be fulfilled. Meredith, the philosopher could sense the depth of this matter so seriously in an age when the people were enjoying the sound slumber of ignorance. They were unaware of the arrival of the modern age.

Latin, as Aunt Bell pointedly mentioned in 'Evan Harrington' was an obstacle to marriage. The gentleman, we have to suppose, might well fear that a woman of leisure was expected to maintain an interest in Latin and other subjects. A woman must be cautious in speaking of politics. She should limit her remark to personality, as it would be awkward for a Melville Jocelyn to stammer out his ignorance of statecraft in a serious discourse with a woman. In 'Lord Ormont and his Aminta' Selina could botanise. Meredith found some charm in the botanic interests of Selina. But she must have aesthetic sense. Merely scientific interest would not help her to be a good woman. A girl like Sandra Belloni might learn music. Music may become a part of her life or she would have some chance of being encouraged to achieve exceptional skill but a Sandra Belloni must still submit to being patronised by the musically untutored Poles. Other accomplishments she might have, and these along with music, were directed towards making her vivacious in a drawing room. Even the gentle, retiring Laetitia Dale succeeds in making Willoughby a much more lively minded man than he would be without her.
“But when a woman like Diana Warwick lets her wit and her knowledge of art and politics become apparent instead of submerging than beneath a soft exterior”. She is at once a fare mark for censure. She is criticized both by men who cannot match and by the women who have hypocritically acquiesced in the subordinate social role of women.

On the other hand Meredith’s gentlemen admire riding. Riding was considered as merit. Rose Jocelyn, it is implied, is more daring on horseback than most girls are. But she had to drop to the role of inciting Evan and Laxley to risk their necks in a race. Janet Ilchester rides well and is pleased that Ottilia does too. But Janet like Rose is a typical Meredithian courageous heroine. While Ottilia’s riding is only grace on horseback. Carinthia’s agility in the mountains, Clara’s foottracing with Crossjay and the amazing feat of swimming on the part of Aminta – these are the events, which clearly show the writer’s attitude towards women. He never wanted them to be like the delicate dolls, only used for decorating the dressing rooms. For each of them the author has created a contrasting picture of the harem existence of others.

In the first version of ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’, Carola Grandison, still a young girl openly wishes she were a boy. The bitterness in the lives of Margaret Lovell, Livia Fleetwood and Mrs. Mountfalcon, is in the helpless negativity to which their sex commits them. Without acknowledged serious occupation women of spirit are in the anomalous and never-destroying position of studying to suppress or disguise their natural wish for bold self-expression. They are in danger of becoming self-conscious and
sentimental in the constant war between their desire of fulfilment of their natures and the necessity of denying that desire.

Meredith was among those who found enticement to vice, the consequence of a young man's lack of acquaintance with girls. He has earnestly urged for co-education. The girls and boys must be brought up together in a healthy atmosphere so that they may be trained for any situation to be faced in future. To contrast with the actual conditions, Meredith depicted men and women's search for the naturalness, which conventions had thwarted. The true lovers in his novels such as Diana and Redworth, Clara and Vernon or Aminta and Wayburn use each other as the touchstone to test their own worthiness. The proper relationship of the sexes was not an obliteration of difference of interest. The heroines are the best, when thoroughly feminine. They are purified of the wish to imitate a masculine role. The men are freest and most masculine when they do not think of women as their intellectual satellite.

Meredith severely ridiculed the moral standard related to general Victorian economic and social life of the age. He also ridiculed more often the conflict of the sexes. Possession of love without obligation was the masculine idea of the time, which was criticised by the author. His heroes like Sir Willoughby or Sir Austin Feverel or many others cloak their wishes under sentiment. His Lord Ormont pretended that seduction of affection is the legitimate end of a fair contest. The novels such as 'Diana of the Crossways' or 'Beauchamp's Career' or 'One of our Conquerors' or indeed almost every novel dealt with the allusion to the chase. A woman was fair prey, first to be
haunted by the lawless and then, if captured to have the reputation devoured by the moral hypocrites, male or female.

According to Meredith one of the by-products of the civilisation was the development of the sentimentalist and an important aspect of sentimentalism was hypocrisy. Unfortunately the hypocrisy was one of the chief features of Victorian society. Meredith openly wrote about the narrowness of collective women, ready to pounce on unconventionality and particularly of the humbug of the middle class, for whom conventionality was as much social as moral insurance. Woman was to be a strong 'fortress', yet since fortresses are passive; she must paradoxically be helpless. So ultimately she has to be in need of a man's protection. It could be clearly illustrated from the following paragraph. In the chapter thirty of 'One of Our Conquerors' Meredith generalises upon the irrational demands made by women let Victorian civilisation:

"Thus was she (Nesta), too being put into her woman's harness of the bit and the blinkers, and taught to know herself for the weak thing, the gentle parasite, which the fiction of our civilisation expects her, caressing and contemptuously, to become in the active, while it is exacted of her - O comedy of Clowns! - that in the passive she be a rock - fortress impregnable, not to a peak of magically encircled".

Needless to say, Nesta typically casts the harm aside. She was to give dignity to man's life, yet live a harem existence. And she was expected to provide man with an alluring chase. Then she was expected to suffer punishment for her charms when he chose her as a mate not the exciting object of the hunt but a gentle candle worshipper.
Even in 'Tragic Comedians', the author has shown the ludicrousness involved in "expecting utterly differently things of woman and then condemning individuals was one expression of polished barbarism."

Throughout his novels Meredith has emphasised upon the modern generation. The world, in which the characters live, is both tragic and comic in so far as it is built in contradictions of nature. There is the romantic child like wonder and simple life. The cautiously occupation with man made distinction at the same time there is the denial of nature which is tragically evil. Nature itself is a primary force, whether influencing character through its physical landscape and climate or symbolising a norm of action. That allows wholesome exercise of blood and imagination. It is the ultimate struggle of character with this force that gives the dramatic tension in a novel. But above all it is the delineation of women, which makes him stand apart. His female figures are the result of the psychological study. In his famous novel 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel' one comes across such variety of images used for women, to reveal the strength a woman possesses not only to hold a man but the society. Here is an instance where the father tries to explain the importance of women to his son.

"But", and he gazed on Richard intensely, "it is given to very few to meet good women on the threshold- I may say to none, we find them after buffeting, and usually when we find the one fitted for us, our madness is miss-shaped, our destiny, or lot is cast. For women are not the end, but the means of life. In youth we think them, the formal, and thousands who have not even the excuse of youth, select a mate - or worse - with
that soul view. I believe women punish us for so perverting their uses. They punished Society. 9 (Page 149)

In another novel 'The Tragic Comedians' Meredith says, "Who can hold her back when a women is decided to move? Husbands have tried it vainly, and parents: and though the husband and the parents are not dealing with the same kind of woman, you see the same elemental power in her under both conditions of rebel wife and rebel daughter to break conventional laws, and be splendidly irrational. That is, if she can be decided; in other words aimed at a mark and inflamed to fly the barriers intercepting." 10 (Page 86)

In the same novel Meredith successfully reflects a change in the attitude and the character of hero. Alvan who realises his mistakes and says, "He had won it, of course, having brought all his powers to bear on the task; and he rejoiced in winning it: his heart leapt, his imagination spun radiant webs of colour: but he was little ashamed of his frenzies, though he did not distinctly recall them: he fancied, he had made some noise, loud or not --- A man should have a life and rear children, not to be forgotten in the land, and to help mankind by transmitting to future times, qualities he has proved priceless: he thought of children, and yearned to the generation of men physically and morally through them."

This was his apology to the world for his distantly recollected excesses of temperament.

Thus, in the portrait gallery Meredith we have a number of radiant heroines. A detailed study of their nature, manner, wit, beauty and artistic presentation will be made in the fourth chapter.
References Chapter I


2. Priestley J. B., George Meredith.


8. An Essay on Comedy’ George Meredith

9. Ordeal of Richard Feveral’ by George Meredith.

10. Tragic Comedians by George Meredith

11. Ilid