Chapter - II

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It is said that great literature is the expression of great personality and Meredith's personality has surely projected itself into his works. Meredith, the prophet could very well peep into the future. He could realise that the existing lifeless traditions of his age were not healthy enough for the progress of human being. He highly believed in co-relationship between Nature and Man. He knew that the imbalance in the interrelationship between man and woman would lead to a big disaster. Meredith emphasises the proportionate and harmonious growth of blood, brain and spirit, which can only ensure an ideal progress of an individual personality. He recognised a woman's capacity to bring back the harmony between man and nature. In order to set things in right order Meredith has conceived his own social philosophy. This chapter deals with Meredith's intentions behind setting such a new theory in which woman is placed right at the centre. In order to understand Meredith's intentions, it becomes necessary to have a look at the social set-up of his age.

It is witnessed that the literature of the last decade of Nineteenth Century was characterised by revolt against the time and honoured tendencies such as order, decorum and decency also replied in the Victorians. The cherished ideals of the great age had been assailed by writers like Carlyle, Ruskin and Arnold. These writers went a step forward in raising a more sustained protest against the older values of art and life. This
period was characterised by an extraordinary social and intellectual ferment. Men were no longer satisfied with simple security of old orthodox assumptions. People had become conscious of living in a world of rapid change and felt a spirit of free enquiry and criticism. The age also had witnessed a strong reaction against the accepted standards of conduct and belief. In religion, in social relations, in domestic life men grew contemptuous of the old ideas. There was no political principle, no theological dogma, no social tradition or moral sentiment that was not challenged. The questioning spirit bred a sense of disillusionment. The old restraints and taboos were repudiated and new generation claimed unfettered freedom of thought and action. Men as well as women showed an extraordinary enthusiasm for speculation, experiment and reform.

This new spirit of unrest was a fairly widespread symptom of the social and intellectual life of the times and was not confined to a few discontented. The plea was simply accepted by a later generation. The conflict between the old way of life and new ideal of individual liberty often manifested in prolonged controversies and critical discussion. The new age was an age of incessant argument, free competition of ideas and opinion and free enterprise in propounding them. These were the essence of the new spirit of the liberalism. The progress of science had changed the external environment of life and provided facilities for freedom of movement and activity. The spirit of free and rational enquiry engendered by science fostered a critical attitude towards religion. It gave rise to a tremendous activity, rationality and intellectual analysis, which enabled many people to have a kind of evaluation and assessment of the performances of the Victorian age. In addition to this there were many burning social problems which
directly or indirectly influenced the literary activity. The generation of the closing years of 19th century claimed a wide charter of liberty and stepped out of the cages of conventions and customs into a freedom full of tremendous potentialities for good as well as evil.

The struggle between the old spiritual theory and the new material theory in England ended simply in wedlock. The great Victorian rationalism has succeeded in doing a great damage to religion. The new science had driven the people back on being irreligious. They had started doubting things which man's normal imagination does not necessarily doubt. The Victorian England was in a state which some called liberty and some called lockjaw. G. K. Chesterton said, 'of the Victorian age as a whole it is true to say that it did discover a new thing called 'Nonsense'.

But there came a time, roughly somewhere about 1880, when the old wave and the new seemed to be spent. At the same time one cannot forget the fact that the Victorian era was also essentially a period of peace and prosperity for England. The peace had brought material advancement and industrial progress in the country. The industrial revolution of the age had transformed the Agrarian economy of England to an Industrial economy. The empire had reached its acme. Tremendous wealth increased in England so the Victorians were floating high on the sky. But, at the same time this particular wealth and the political authority should have been used to create an ideal society in England. Unfortunately this could not be achieved. Industrial advancement failed to provide comfort and satisfaction to the common labourer and had created social unrest and
economic distress among the poor. On the one side there were Empire, mongers and on the other side there was the idealistic reaction. With the whirligig of the time a wave of social unrest swept over England. Knowledge and acceptance of one's proper station was the basic element in Victorianism. The acceptance of authority such as the authority of church, the authority of laws, the authority of employers, the authority of parents became the chief characteristic of the Victorian England. The picture of such horrid society was brought forward by the writers like Dickens, Ruskin and Carlyle. This age also witnessed vigorous social reforms. It could be rightly called as an age of Humanitarian considerations and social uplift of the masses. All these reforms laid the solid foundation of political democracy, which heralded the birth of democratic consciousness among the Victorian people. A conflict between Aristocracy and Plutocracy on the one hand and democracy and socialism on the other hand was witnessed. It was only during this period the expectation raised by the French Revolution came to be fulfilled. In such circumstances the impact of democracy on the literature is quite evident.

From the second quarter of the Nineteenth Century onward it was more and more evident that a literary transition was developing. Romanticism was not completely dead but its creative force was becoming exhausted. Writers in ever increasing numbers turned to other sources of inspiration. It was the inner movement of the mind, which took them away from Romanticism. Since the Sixteenth Century science had been growing as a rival force of religion and art. The English mind was thus laid to reason–out habits, positive emotions and cautious methods in actions and thought. This close connection between material expansion on the one hand and phase of realism on the other hand had
influenced all the spheres of life. By the middle of Nineteenth Century, science had held a place of primal importance among the intellectual pre-occupations of the average man. Science no more remained the privilege of an elite. It gave power also the satisfaction of logical thinking. The goal it set out was the search after truth. It was linked together in a carefully balanced system. Thus the parallel and simultaneous development of all the science of mind and matter proceeded with the irresistible trend of great historical changes.

Thus the rapid development of physical science in the Victorian age transformed the social environment of the people and made itself felt in the literature of the age. As noted by Compton and Rickett, “The advancement of science has transformed man’s outlook upon life and has affected many channels of intellectual activity.” The world also witnessed a great outpouring of scientific literature. Such epoch-making works as Darwin’s ‘Origin of the Species’, Sir Lyell’s works on Geology, Herbert Spencer’s ‘Doctrine on Progress’, T. H. Huxley and John Tyndall etc. exercised tremendous influence on Victorian literature. Though the work of Darwin cannot be said to belong to literature but it had most powerfully affected the thought of the whole century. It had modified the outlook of the scientist and gradually in turn that of every thinker. Its influences were also seen over imaginative life and the aesthetic activity of the mind. So, Darwin, though man of science was regarded as a social figure exercising a deep and profound influence on the social and educational life of the age.
Along with the writers of scientific spirit, there were also the majority of philosophers, historians, and scholars who were affected. A man like John Stuart Mill threw clear intellectual light on the process of logic, on the principles of political economy, on liberty and the problems of status of woman. Herbert Spencer, co-ordinated ideas drawn from various sciences into a coherent and comprehensive systems of thought.

Thus the scientific spirit, which was widening its hold on the realities of moral life, finally reached the field of religion. It brought with it a principle of transformation. During mid Nineteenth Century the struggle between science and traditional theology became apparent. Inspite of advancement in science and scientific discoveries, the general tenor of life was still governed by religious and moral considerations. There was a marked conflict between religion and science. In this trial, belief sometimes, seems to be overcome. The disturbance in religious foundation gave rise to disillusionment. This new thinking contributed to pervade the intellectual atmosphere with an element of doubt.

It was in the same period, England also witnessed expansion in the field of education. The passing of Education Act was a landmark in the history of England. A large ‘reading public’ was prepared to welcome the outpouring novelists, poets and social reformers. Even the middle classes took interest in reading. So many of them had much time in their hands to read especially the women. A powerful group of well-educated and deeply concerned people especially young men and women came forward as readers.
In domestic life, the Victorians upheld the authority of parents over children. Emphasis was laid on authority and reverence of elders. Women were relegated to a lower place. They were expected to cultivate domestic virtues, rear up children and look after the home and the hearth. Women were regarded inferiors to men. It could be witnessed through the writings of many female authors of the day that the female sex was treated as beings to the services to the male. The first thing of importance was to be inferior to men, inferior in mental power in the same proportion that they were inferior in strength. Education was a closed book for most of the women. It is quite shocking to note here that the idea of establishing women's colleges was ridiculed by most of the representative writers of the day. There had been a ceaseless mass struggle in all the spheres of life. People were getting aware of the violent pressures. The most authentic voices of the day were also unable to express the real condition of the age. They were not in a position to decide whether they should create a dark picture or a bright picture of England. Many of the writers preferred to avoid discussing this issue. Religious disturbance manifesting itself in despair was the outcome of such a predicament. A man like Matthew Arnold found himself in utter confusion and said,

"between two worlds, one dead.  
The other powerless to be born."

In addition to this sorrowful condition of the dichotomy between absolute wealth and authority on the one hand and utter poverty of intellectuality on the other hand resulting into disillusionment and pessimism. Many thinkers and writers felt lost. Some attempted
some sort of compromise and failed. Others were knocked about on the flood of doubt and despair. New scientific discoveries and inventions were like bombshells to the traditional Victorian thinkers. A kind of utter confusion was prevailing everywhere in England.

Under such circumstances, George Meredith, the poet, the novelist, social reformer, champion of women, the great humanist, and visionary started writing. He was in true sense an analyst of the mind and soul. His writing was a philosophic commentary on man in society. As a real philosopher, he looked into the heart of the contemporary struggle and realised where the struggle was going. He was seriously concerned with enduring issues in the contemporary life. He had a strong willingness to go deep into reality. He wanted to set up a new formula, on the basis of which he would prescribe something. He was highly absorbed in attempts to solve some of ‘the riddles of life’. He found the life full of warfare, a world tangled and perplexed, a world gradually evolving. For him the world was but a sensational world at present, in maternal travel of a soberer, a braver, a brighter-eyed and so he set to work to try and see how it could be amended. He tried to see how human nature could rise to higher levels and how each individual would learn to adjust himself to his environment in order to create an ideal condition of living. He dug with no sparing hand to the very roots of evil and found that one of the great causes of failures was the want of balance between ‘our earthly, intellectual and spiritual natures.’
George Meredith, invariably, thought that he was separate from all the rest of his contemporaries. He considered himself to be special and extraordinary. This facet of his nature could also be found in his childhood. From an early age, however he was dissatisfied with his environment and was always acutely sensitive in temperament. In his school he had the reputation of being proud and reserved with his schoolmates. The moral training of the Moravians was a fine thing for him. He was taught to practise what was taught. Their liberal teaching had begun in an age of religious unrest and intolerance. This gave him an outlook, which over road narrow religious prejudices and taught him the value of liberalism and good manners. In fact it was at Neuwied, where he developed emotionally and intellectually. In his isolated situation he found solace in Nature. It stimulated him for long walks on which he was accompanied by his father. He came to know the hinterland of shady pastures, thick hedgeways, and hills overlooking the bright sea, wooded valley, and the pleasant flower banks. It is here that he found love for nature, which helped him, a lot in evolving his own theory of nature. His wonderful poems like ‘Love in the Valley’ and ‘Poems of the English Roadsides with Poems and Ballads’, ‘Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth’, ‘A Reading of Earth’ throw light upon his strong belief in nature.

George Meredith’s work spreads from the publication of ‘The Shaving of Shagpat’ in 1855 to his death in 1909. It covers the last fifty years of the Nineteenth Century. His first famous novel ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’ appeared in the same year when George Eliot’s ‘Adam Bede’ in 1859. It also happened to be the year of ‘The Origin of Species’ by Darwin, of Fitzgerald’s ‘Omar Khayyam’ and J. S. Mill’s ‘On
Liberty'. It is also the year when Herbert Spencer’s ‘Scientific and Philosophical works’ and Carlyle’s ‘Fredrick the Great’ came out. Meredith’s early works came out at such a
time. It was the time when the state of womanhood was of total repression and almost of
bondage. Many novelists had well depicted the position of women in the Victorian
society. Most of them tried to portray the real position of women in the existing society.
The hypocrisy, the false complacency and other cherished ideals are equally and
effectively extended to the state of woman as visualised by Victorians. The age had also
witnessed the great shift from royalism to uncompressed democracy. As a result of this,
people had started enjoying the sweet fruits of liberty. Educational opportunities were
made open for all. But unfortunately the condition of women in the society was still
horrifying. Inspite of the high ideals and cultural achievements, a woman was not at all
given her equal share in this achievement. This can be clearly seen from the female
characters created by the novelists like Thackeray, George Elliot or Thomas Hardy. The
characters carefully visualised by them give us the clear idea of the position of women in
Victorian society.

Inspite of tremendous changes caused due to industrial revolution, the political
and economical reforms were experienced by the people in this age, and the attitude
towards was not as revolutionised as it was expected. The questions related to such as
the proper position of woman in society were still unanswered. The function they might
legitimately and usefully endeavoured to discharge in addition to those of the family
which obviously falls upon them, the education which would fit them for those questions
were beginning to be agitated in Victorian England. These agitations were offsprings of
those democratic developments. They received inspirations from the utilitarian doctrine, which taught them that in thinking the balance between the good and the evil, everybody had to fight for it.

In such a confused atmosphere, a sensitive man like George Meredith could hardly feel comfortable. He was suffocating in the atmosphere of lifeless traditions. His intellectual make up made him restless and compelled him to formulate a philosophy of life. He came forward with new set of ideas. He had an open mind to absorb Darwinian theory of evolution and the scientific revolution towards a new position to be entrusted to women. Meredith had an intuitive understanding into the psychic position of woman. The creator in Meredith lavished all his art upon them and took special delight in delineating as they are. For him women were growing images of health and beauty. His philosophy melted with lyric ecstasy at the sight of them. Women, for him, were Earth, smiling and triumphant. He strongly believed that they were very close to nature. At times they actually take Her place and could become personification of Nature. This way it becomes essential to understand this particular philosophy of Meredith because he entrusted a very dominant role to woman in this set-plan of Nature.

It is true that different sociologists and social historians of England in the later Nineteenth Century paid a lot of attention to describe the condition of woman in all the spheres of life such as in house, in society in nation. It gives comparatively a black picture. A woman was never considered to be an equal to man. Nor was she allowed a complete freedom to indulge in social, political or administrative position. On such a
background, it may be true that Meredith wanted to have a new conception of woman. But it was not so easy for him to sketch the actual role that should be entrusted to woman. It appears that his knowledge and understanding of Darwin’s theory of evolution had helped him a lot. The theory categorically stated that the present society is only a stage in its progress towards ideal condition. All the religious beliefs that forced the society to be in superstitious condition were being removed by various persons in various fields. But Meredith wanted to inject the spirit of intellectualism to solve the problem of woman in society. It was a fact that the woman was not given full freedom. She was not treated as an equal at the sexual levels. That might be the reason as to why Meredith had to give a lot of thinking into this and then he felt the need to evolve a new philosophical network. In this network he intended to allot a rightful position to woman. The Victorian era saw a lot of struggle on the part of woman. She also was fighting though a losing battle to acquire the equality along with a man in the society. There were so many social traditions, which looked upon a woman’s activity in a limited way. In order to give a woman her rightful status Meredith came forward with his revolutionary ideas.

Meredith strongly believed that a society could never develop unless and until all the ingredients in that society are allowed to grow equally in that society. Like all the men of radical and reforming temper, Meredith too was a social optimist. He had a complete faith in human progress. He was well aware of the fact that the society was not perfect. Otherwise it would be in no need to reform. But it was sound at the core, representing a very definite advance otherwise it would not be worth reforming. It would only be worth destroying. So Meredith had his own criterion to see whether the existing
society was in good or bad condition. He felt that the most important relationship that could enable towards the healthy growth was the relationship between man and woman. He also stresses upon the progress of individual in a society. He had a strong and profound belief in the advancement by means of social reformation. It is strikingly and directly emphasised in his novels. Almost all his novels deal with human relationship. He was sure that the civilisation could be held together by a forward movement in society. This whole philosophy of living for the generations to come tends to intensify his attitude. It is the aim of personality which he found more important that the personality itself. Because the personality may die but its aims and purposes last longer. In his first novel ‘The Shaving of Shagpat’, Meredith puts his ideas regarding woman very clearly. He says, “woman is still the prize and not the toy, whether of men or God.” She can be liberated only by and through man. And what she must be liberated from are the roles, which man has imposed upon her. She has been seen as vessel of death, fatal woman, shrine, slave, servant, victim of vanity, biologically unsound and so forth.

Meredith always thought that woman to be more powerful than man. This view of him could be clearly illustrated from the comment passed by Lady Charlotte the Earl of Ormont’s sister in his famous novel. He writes, “Unable to read woman’s character, except upon the broadest lines, as it were the spider’s main spreads of its web, she read men minutely, from the fact that they were neither mysteries or terrors to her, but creatures of importunate appetites, humorous objects; very manageable, if we leave the road to their musites, dress their wounds, smooth their creases, plume their variety; and she had an unerring eye for the man to be used. When a blow was needed, methods for
setting him in action likewise. She knows how much stronger than ordinary men the woman who can put them in motion. They can be act to serve as pieces of cannon, under compliments on their superior powers, which were not all undervalued by her on their an merits, for she worshipped strength. But she said, with a certain amount of truth, that the women unaware of the advantage. Society gave them (as to mastering men) were fools. (page 35, Lord Ormont and his Aminta) thus when it came to the duel between the man and the woman, her sense of justice was moved to join her with the party of her unfairly handled sisters—a the one she considered very strong.

Meredith's novels express his optimistic views towards life. According to him personal development was an important phase of evolution and he himself was pre-eminently interested in this idea. It is very clearly described in his famous novel, 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel' where he says, "Personality is a progressive activity." While in another famous novel 'Diana of the Crossways' he says, "Our revolt is all but a sensational world. At present in maternal travail of a soberer, brighter eyed, service is our destiny in life or in death. Then let it be my choice living to serve the living and be fretted uncompromisingly. If I can assure myself of doing service I have my home within." In the same novel he further says, "A thousand years, you may count full many a thousand by this route before you are one with divine philosophy. Where as a single flight of brains will reach and embrace her; give you the savour of Truth, the right use of the senses, Reality's infinite sweetness; for these things are in philosophy and the fiction which the summary of actual Life, the within and without of us, is, prose or verse, plodding or soaring, philosophy's elect handmaiden. To such an end let us bend our aim
to work knowing that every form of labour, even this flimsiest should minister to
growth.\textsuperscript{3}

The philosophy of Meredith is a philosophy of Nature and Life in the widest
sense. It is a wonderful mixture of romanticism and modernism, faith and reason,
religion and science. His poems crystallised this philosophy and his novels displayed his
action. In fact all his work is primarily the vehicle of his philosophy. He believed that
brain stuff is not lean stuff. The brain stuff of fiction is internal history. The forecast
may be hazarded that, if do not speedily embrace philosophy in fiction, the Art is doomed
to extinction under the shining multitudes of its professors.

Nature, to Meredith signifies the inspired sanity of progress and echoes the
exacted melody of external beauty. For him She becomes close and universal. It strikes in
him chords that show that he himself sprung from her and is a unit of her plan. She
becomes mystical and aesthetical. She the mother, she is the goddess. He imagines us to
be the children of the Earth. Her teaching is that of ceaseless, ordered and perpetual
advance full of unselfishness. We must understand her from the standpoint that is
founded on the senses as well as on the imagination. Though we are her children, we too
have individualities. The mystic element in his philosophy of nature is quite strong.
Though he does not frequently write in such directly mystical language, but it is the spirit
in which all his description of nature is wrought.
In 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel,' Meredith has expressed his views on nature more explicitly in the form of a book 'THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP' he says, 'Let us remember, that Nature, though heathenish, reaches at her best to the footstool of the Highest. She is not all dust, but a living portion of the spheres. In aspiration, it is our error to despise her, forgetting that through Nature only we can ascend. Cherished, trained and purified, she is then partly worthy the divines mate who is to make her wholly so. St. Simeon saw the Hog of Nature and took nature for the hog.

He is always overwhelmed with a sense of eternal theme that is eternally beyond him. He always feels a strange similitude between his highest score opened thoughts and the great moments that spring from death and nature. Meredith is in a real degree the master of this sense, for he not only knows it but also has embodied it in living imagery. Nature, though simple in the sum total of her teaching, is not simple in the emotions she arouses. There is much that is incomprehensible in her and that is to be grasped more by intuition than reason. In a letter written on the 4th May shortly before his death, he said, "Nature is my God and I trust in her... without doubt, lovers of Nature, as long as they contact with men, cannot escape suffering; but their burdens will be lightened since they themselves turn towards Nature..." 4

It is the same nature in which Richard Feverel tries to find solace with his beloved Lucy. He is well aware of the power of Nature. He believes that only Nature can find a solution in the hours of crisis. He says, "Away with systems! Away with the corrupt world! Let us breathe the air of Enchanted Island. Golden lie the meadows; golden run
the streams; red gold is on the pine-stems. The sun is coming down to earth and walks
the fields and the waters.

The sun is coming down to earth and fields and the waters shout to him golden
shouts. He comes, and his heralds run before him, and the leaves of oaks and planes and
beeches lucid green, and the pine-stems redder gold; leaving brightest footprints upon
thickly-weeded banks, where the foxglove’s last upper-bells incline and bramble-shoots
wander amid moist rich herbage. The plumes of woodland are alight; and beyond, over
the open it is a race with the long-thrown shadows; a race across the heaths and up the
hills, till, as the farthest borne of mounted clouds, the heralds of the sun lay rosy fingers
and rest.

Sweet are the shy recesses of the woodland. The ray treads softly there. A film
athwart the pathway quivers many hued against purple shade fragrant with warm pine,
deep moss-beds, and feathery ferns. The little brown squirrel drops tail, and leaps; the
innocent bird is startled to a chance tuneless note, from silence into silence things move.

Peeps of revelling splendour above and around enliven the conscious full heart
within. The flowing west, the crimson heights, showers their glories through voluminous
leafage. But these are bowers where deep bliss dwells, imperial joy that owes no fealty
to yonder glories, in which the young lamb gambles and the spirits of men are glad.
Descend great Radiance! Embrace creation with beneficent fire, and pass from us! You
and vice-regal light that succeeds to you, and all heavenly pageants, are the ministers and the slaves of the throbbing content within.

For this is the home of enchantment. Here, secluded from vexed shores, the prince and princess of the island meet: here like darkling nightingales they sit and into eyes and ears and hands pour endless ever fresh treasure of their souls."

Meredith believed that Nature dwells not only in the scene but also in us, not only in the woods but also in the streets. She is around everything and in everything. Nature’s influence over us comes in fact through very different channels. It comes through outward observations as well as through inward sympathy. We are simplified and purified by contacting the reality of Nature. She means too much to Meredith than simply the emotional stimulus of her outward loveliness. He took a special joy in presenting a glorious picture of the future of the human race. And in suggesting that individual life does not die. It lives on in the larger, richer life of the future, which it helped to build up. Just as he saw hope for the individual and for the race in the process of evolution, so Meredith trusted in growth and change to bring about social and political advancement. He believed that more brain, power and the cultivation of reason and of intellect could help to bring its expected changes. He hated the materialism and meanness of the modern life. Above all he hated the undue preponderance given to wealth and weakness to which it ultimately led. Yet everywhere, amid prevalent evil, he recognised the signs of progress and ultimate betterment. He believed in the worth of
human fellowship and duty to service. Such service could be rendered only as a result of the knowledge that comes from resolute facing of facts in Nature as well as in human life.

From Nature’s parental dealings with men and from the success of those who serve Meredith deduces the laws of man’s life. His social doctrines are corollaries of his view of Nature. His ethics are complementary to his sociology. This determines his basic values. His moral social and political science is in consonance with the theory of Nature and Man developing in unison. Nature prevails persistently in the writing of his poems too. In a poem ‘Hard Weather’ Meredith expands his favourite theme that we must face nature in both her moods – joyful as well as painful, sun and storm – in order to achieve harmony within ourselves. The harmony of the mind emerging from the body – he writes

“Though farther from her nature rude,
Yet nearer to her spirit’s hold;
And though of gentler mood serene,
Still forceful is her fountain-jet.”

He believes that man evolves spiritually from his animal element towards his God element through a process of physical and mental adjustment. The proper relation of blood and brain results in spirit. The development of wisdom within the individual is expressed thus:

“In your breast the light must burn
Fed of you like corn in quern
Ever pluming while the wheel
Speeds the milk and drains the meat.”
Thus Nature to Meredith, is a spirit, 'the spirit of life pervading all things and her processes are spiritual processes with which man can labour in unison.' The spiritual character of Nature's activity is virtually implied in any theory of semi-conscious volition or semi-atomic evolution. Meredith not only endorses this but also applies the same to the development of individual personality. He asserts that personality is a progressive activity. The co-relationship between Nature and Man in Meredith's world-view is summed up in these lines by Baker: “Nature is a living developing divine entity in which man is a living developing divine part. He finds weal in the joyous life of sensation and instinct, keeping true to Mother Earth while fulfilling himself in the exercise of mind and the spiritual activities of art and zeal for the common welfare, in the realisation of beauty, love and sacrifice for his fellows." The ideal progress of the personality depends on the orderly and ascending course of Blood, Brain and Spirit. Any imbalance or dis-turbance in the inter-relationship of the three-Meredith's Trinity-results in egoism or sentimentalism. Each one of them must be well-fed and well-cared for, starvation or indulgence is equally harmful. On the part of life one has to avoid ascetic rocks and the sensuous whirlpools, while advancing towards the creation of certain nobler races now very dimly imagined. Meredith emphasised on the proportionate and harmonious growth of Blood, Brain and Spirit, which ensures the ideal progress of individual personality. Such an individual alone shall justly fulfill his obligation to the society and to the race.

While living life man should never forget his obligation towards the society.

"Blood and Brain and Spirit, three
Join for the felicity.

When man has succeeded in properly balancing his blood and brain the resultant spirit can perceive the reality emerging from the fact and value. He can place himself in proper
position with Nature. But when a man's faculties are out of harmony, his perception is correspondingly inharmonious. Thus reality is external to man. Nature does not respond favourably to man's itch for absolute. Truth is perceived not by seeking for it but rather by a series of internal adjustment. Good and Evil are not to be explained but are to be experienced. Acceptance is the road to wisdom. Man therefore sees reality through the lense of his personality, the pattern of relation between blood and brain and if the picture is out of focus, it is the fault of the lense. Earth, as man's Mother is the source – the only source of man's vitality and any attempt to part the son's or daughter's to deny her idealism – sentimentalism – asceticism results in her seeming like witch – phantom. As it can be seen in the poem 'Earth and Man' –

'She is his well of strength and home of rest.'

And in the nature and life, he invites us to leave the uproar of the cities and walk the woodland path:

"Enter silence, not to sleep, 
Under shadows, not of wrath.

These lines indicate Meredith's view on Earth as the Mother. When she properly regarded, she neither drags man back to dependence nor conversely does she seek to swallow him. Man needs her but cannot remain dependent upon her alone. He needs Earth, but he needs a more--- 'more', which she herself encourages, when seen in the proper perspective. Earth does not provide the goal, he is seeking, but she does provide the strength he needs to achieve it as well as the symbol clues of her cycles by which he can attain. This is God or Master of whom Earth is the footstool or handmaiden. That is a broad view of the rapid inter-shuffling of life and death in Nature, which can make man realise that they are but different aspects of the same truth. That truth is eternal. Thus a
man grows from the Blood to Brain and then to Spirit. This is Meredith's altruisticeligion reconciling scientific thought with human idealism. This earned him the title of
'The Prophet of Sanity'.

According to him man's earth-born nature grows through the stages of blood and
brain to spiritual completeness. It grows from instinct and the healthy exercise of the
senses, to the intelligent control of the self and cheerful submission to the social order.
So, through this, man should try to achieve the loftiest ideals of love and devotion
towards the race. Throughout the life, a man must keep a firm hold on his kinship with
Earth, the Mother. This is possible only when the growth among the blood, the mind and
the spirit is harmonious and equal. He gave equal importance to the blood, mind and
spirit. He did not exclude anything. He kept all the three at the same level as far as
development is concerned. He did not want the body to suffer, as the ascetic wanted. He
did not want the mind to suffer, as the scientist wanted. At the same time he did not want
the spirit to suffer as some materialistic philosopher wanted. So the most important
concept is that the recognition of the body, mind and spirit and the equal growth of these
three factors in order to have a harmonious growth of an individual and ultimately a
harmonious growth of society. This way it is easy to understand Meredith's attitude
towards an individual and society. He banned asceticism, mortification of flesh. This
could be clearly seen from the statement of Redworth in "Diana of the Crossways", he
says "a new start in our existence, finer shoot of the tree strongly planted in good gross
earth; the senses running their live sap, and mind companioned and the spirits made one
by the whole natured conjunction."
Underlying Meredith’s literary theory are his concepts of the world of nature of the intellectual and emotional structure of human beings and of the social order in which the mind can develop. His own perception of nature allowed him to recognise the ruthlessness in animal and plant struggle for survival. He considered the life of the savage, the life, which is adopted itself from primitive nature. Savagery, of course, was not a matter of living in wattled huts, it was a submission to animal standards of culture and under a veneer of politeness could dominate an industrial society. To achieve self-discipline man must accept the stern fact that nature destroys the spiritually passive or savage mind:

“Her (Nature’s) lord, if to her rigid laws he bows;
Her dust, if with his conscience he plays knave;
And bids the passions on the Pleasure browse:
(The Test of Manhood)

Like the romantics, Meredith found in nature immediate spiritual inspiration. He has illustrated this in his poetry as well as prose. For instance, the poem ‘Love in the Valley’ or the well-known ‘Ferdinand and Miranda’ scene in ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’ and in ‘Meditation under Stars’ typify the exaltation brought by natural scenery. Elsewhere, as in Richard’s walk in the German forest, Meredith can speak of the healing and purifying capacity which nature possesses. Especially in ‘Modern Love’ it is his memory of the swan sailing across the lake that turns the hero’s cynical bitterness into tolerant sadness. Even in ‘A Faith on Trial’ written upon the fatal illness of the author’s wife, it is the sight of the cherry tree in blossom, which subdues the cry of doubt by suggesting man’s kinship with the inherent beauty of the universe:
In such instances it is not the poet’s reason which is trying to decide what aspect of nature is good and what is bad: it is his imaginative, vision, which verges on enchantment:

“A wonder edges the familiar face;  
She wears no more that robe of printed hours;  
Half strange seems earth, and sweeter than her flowers.”

(Meditation under Stars)

As an Evolutionist, Meredith believed “the spirit of life” to be forever unfolding itself within man and nature, with man contributing to the progress. In chapter sixteen of ‘One of Our Conquerors’ he speaks of it as being not a ‘remote external who pleases the human figure but something beside us, within us, our breathe if we will’.

Meredith in a different way tried to bring new knowledge into the general idealism. He said that no religion could be valid that rejected knowledge. He accepted evolution as a hypothesis that cast floods of light on human history and by enabling man to organise his life for attainable ends provided a basis for morality. His novels are no more transcripts of experience and no mere materialistic interpretations. Nor was he a metaphysician. He tried to identify the motive agency of evolution. Unquestionably, in his poems and in his novels there are numerous examples of the working of instinct and obscure impulse to the influences of external nature. But Meredith might have been thinking simply of general process of evolution, without considering the ultimate causes of evolution. By recognising this fact he accepted the law. And what had been
unconscious drift under conditions, over which he exercised no control, might become a conscious, purposive and accelerated effort. But it is by listening to Nature’s counsels that he learnt the direction. This is clearly expressed in his poem, ‘Reading of Earth’—

"She can lead us, only she,  
Unto God’s footstool, wither she reaches,  
Loved, enjoyed, his gifts must be,  
Reverenced the truth she teaches,  
Foe a man may hope that he  
Ever can attain the glee  
Of things without a destiny.”

So man perceives the God in Earth and himself. By surveying the history of Earth and tracing the path of evolution he wins the rapture of the forward view.

Meredith identified the prophetic mind ‘called by mortals as imagination’ and accepted it as the infallible intermediary between man and the Divine. Meredith’s faith was in the moral elements, the pre-dominance of good, visible in Nature’s history. Sins are transgressions against natural laws and bring their certain chastisement. Goodness is attained through obedience. This way, in his ‘The Ordeal of Richard Feverel’ Meredith out of his friendship with Nature had found comfort in her essential goodness and in the signals she holds out of her beneficent aims. “The wind that between the old elms and shivered the dead leaves in the air, had a voice and meaning for the baronet during the half-hour’s lonely pacing up and down under the darkness awaiting his boy’s return. The solemn gladness of his heart gave nature a tongue. Through the desolation flying overhead— the wailing of Mother of plenty across the bare – swept land – he caught intelligible signs of the beneficent order of the universe from a heart newly confirmed its grasp of the principles of human goodness, as manifested in the dear child who had just
left him, confirmed in its belief in the ultimate victory of good within us, without which nature has neither music nor meaning, it is rock, stone, tree and nothing more...

In this way Meredith’s belief in Nature enabled him to achieve a strong self-reliance and also provided him with a base from which he looked into the life of things. It helped to understand the emotional and intellectual structure of man and also to see how human mind can contribute to the spirituality of the universe. In this set scheme of Nature, Meredith had allotted a significant role to women. He was well aware of the fact that man is basically an egoistic creature. If a man were left to himself, he would never like to come to the path of practical utility. He categorically stated that “Man is a speculative animal and woman is a practical.” It means man’s indulgence in the speculative aspect invariably drifts him away from the real purpose of Nature. Nature has a particular way of leading things towards perfection. No doubt on the basis of trial and error or sometimes it is part of her experimentation. Nature wants to test everybody or she wants to evolve and develop. On this basis, man’s speculative aspect would come in the way. Unfortunately the responsibility, which is expected to be fulfilled by man, is invariably ignored or forgotten by him. He wants to live a life of his own like a free bird. But nature is aware of this tendency of men. She also knows the importance or essentialities of man in this process of evolution. In order to control a man from going away from her purpose, Nature has entrusted a very special job to woman. In case of a man’s egoism or other discrepancies in the character, a woman is always there to control a man. She does not only work as a controller but also tries to bring him on the correct path, which is the path of utility. It means the great task towards perfection as visualised
by Nature could be continued by woman. She has the capacity to control and correct the man, who drifts away from the task given by the Nature. In order perform this great job of Nature, a woman has been rewarded with some special qualities. With the help of these attributes a woman is able to complete her particular mission.

Meridith has been accused of not completely championing the liberation of women because he regularly married his heroines instead of letting them have independent careers. For certain of his women marriage is the lesser evil and they accept sacrificially. For them, including Latitia, the novelist has pity. But as marriage in Meredith's view was an expansion of one's imaginative horizons, he made such a union the fulfillment of a woman's life. When Clara imagines a husband she thinks of intellectual companionship. It is like immersing oneself in human experience. This, the antithesis of desire for possession, means the losing of all feelings isolation and the living within one mind the lives of two. It is not restrictive, as Meredith would not have either a man or a woman to shut other lives upon marriage. According to him liberation of woman as well as men does not involve sending a woman along a path of unmarried friendship. He redefines the marriage as to give her all the freedom she would otherwise possess and in addition special affinity of thought and feeling which union implies.

Thus Meredith has conceived his own philosophy of Nature which is evolved through his own understanding of Nature. In this theory he has placed a woman right at the centre and has allotted her the great job of continuation and correction of species.
Apart from this theory Meredith has also put forward the theory of Comedy and made use of it as a weapon against the social and personal follies.
References Chapter II.


2. Crompton and Rickett, "History of English Literature"


5. George Meredith, "The Ordeal of Richard Feveral, page 124, constable and company ltd, 1909

