The present attempt aims at studying the fiction of George Gissing in the light of scientific thoughts. The study shall also examine the relationship of science and the fiction led by George Gissing. From this point of view desired work has not been done so far to show how George Gissing made his attempt in order to contribute to English fiction.

Science refers to a system of acquiring knowledge. This system uses observation and experimentation to describe and explain natural phenomena. The term science also refers to the organized body of knowledge people have gained using that system. Less formally, the word science often describes any systematic field of study or the knowledge gained from it.

George Gissing is one of the most powerful novelists of transition from Victorian to the modern age. Gissing in his novels presents the most perturbing socio-economic, cultural and political situations. He also presents the changes, which had been taking place in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Hence, Gissing’s novels serve as a bridge between Victorian and modern literature.

Gissing is essentially a clear-eyed realist and a humanist. He is a critic of Victorian manners and the social, economic and of political conditions of that age. He charged the battery of his satire against existing social and moral values, commercialization of art and materialistic culture. Gissing’s denunciation of social inequalities, economic exploitation, the low standard of cultural achievements and the subjection of women express his
resentment with the conventional Victorian values.

Gissing’s earlier thinking was shaped by his reading of Comte under the influence of Richard Congreve (1818-1899), a philosopher, and a disciple of Comte. The positivistic thinking, the effect of which is vivid in Gissing’s novels of early eighties may be substantiated with Gissing’s own words. Gissing was profoundly influenced by contemporary intellectual milieu. Comte’s positivistic influence on England, the clash between agnosticism and established religion had a deep impact on young.

Victorian age encouraged inquiry into an examination of traditional, religious and moral attitudes. A vigorous rationalism championed by such agnostics as Leslie Stephen, Thomas Henry Huxley, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer clashed with intuitive, religion. They attacked its three most crucial doctrines the existence of God, the literal accuracy of the Bible and immortality of the soul. All the old spiritual convictions seemed to open to question and subject to revision. Throughout Victorian literature the crumbling of religious belief was a common subject.

George Gissing approximates Hardy in his outlook towards God and universe and the place of man in a vast world, being controlled by a blind and powerful force: he dittoes, “Thomas Love Peacock in his outlook towards science.” As to the first approach, he regards universe an inhabitation where ultimate causes are inscrutable where man’s destiny is predetermined by an indifferent and nonchalant Providence: where man suffers miserably at the cruel and merciless destiny. “Rather must I apprehend,” he writes, “that man, in some inconceivable way, may at his best moments represent a principle darkly at strife with that which prevails throughout the world as known to us.”(Letters, 200) The Manichaeism
system of universe seems to have confirmed his view that man should constantly endeavor to glorify good without the least expectation of its being rewarded; and, in this advocacy for the good for its own sake, he conveniently tallies the Puritan conception of virtue. “Of all theological systems,” he writes, “the most convincing is the Manichaeism, which, of course under another name, was held by the Puritans themselves.” (Letters, 280)

Science, he regards, as “the remorseless enemy of mankind.” (Letters, 268) In science, he sees, the end of “all the beauty of the world;” an approach typically Peacockian in substance, who, too, regards science as the most powerful virus which gradually eats into the vitality of human life; and who in his famous novels - *Headlong Hall, Melincourt, Crotchet Castle, Gryll Grange, Maid Marian, The Misfortanes of Elphin,* and *Nightmare Abbey* enunciates the philosophy of scientific agnosticism through such immortal characters of his as Mr. Forster, ‘the perfectibilian,’ Mr. Escot, ‘the deteriorationist,’ Mr. Jenkinson, ‘the status-quo-ite,’ and the Reverend Doctor Gaster. Gissing finds in new civilization, based on science the roots of barbarism, the callousness of heart, and the seeds of all beastly conflicts. Science, for him, is not an-ennobling force or a soothing balm or blessing fairy, it is rather a demon bent on creating ‘a blood-drenched chaos’ in mankind.

‘I see,’ he passionately argues against science, ‘it is destroying all simplicity and gentleness of life, all the beauty of the world; I see it restoring barbarism under a mask of civilization; I see it darkening men’s minds and hardening their hearts; I see it bringing a time of vast conflicts, which will pale into insignificance ‘the thousand wars of old’ and, as likely as not, will
whelm all the laborious advances of mankind in blood-drenched chaos. (Letters, 168-69)

In *Demos* (1886), Kingcote, “the refined, sensitive and pessimistic” (17) prototype of the novelist himself, “tortured with jealously is Isabel’s apparent lightness,”(19) and “a demagogue of the working-classes,”(19) typifies Gissing’s scientific objectivity -with a hostile reaction to it.

In *Thyrza* (1887), Thyrza, a factory-girl imbued with the Ruskinian teaching, vehemently reacts to the scientific impact on modern life, and regards industrialization as a bane on human happiness, because her love, meandering through serpentine ways of modern civilization, ends in renunciation and death.

In *A Life's Morning* (1888), James Payn transmogrifies her simple pleasures of life into a tragic one, because it is science, which is wholly responsible for it. In another famous novel, *The Nether World* (1889), Gissing presents a sharp reaction to scientific march, because it has caused a gloomy panorama of misery, of squalor, and of savagery in the modern life. In *New Grub Streets* (1891), Gissing curses science and its world, in which even authors are forced to struggle in an environment of garrets and basements, often too poor to afford a fire, and slaving daily at the British Museum for an uncertain pittance. In *Born in Exile* (1893), Gissing presents the inner history of a man whose integrity, rather than his happiness, has been affected by science. In *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), *Eve's Ransom* (1895), and *The Whirlpool* (1897), both present Gissing's scientific approach to study the effects of the socialistic programme on different characters and their capacities: Rolfe's uncertainty, in *The Whirlpool*, for example, show the gist of all these works, namely, the revolt against “the softness and sweetness of civilization,” (13)
and he is, ultimately, forced to recognize “the brute savagery of it,” (19) “the very lingo,” (19) “the tongue of white chapel blaring lust of life in the track of English guns;” (19) and prognosticates further that the complex social life will prove a curse to the posterity.

As far as his narrative techniques are concerned it can be said that structure of his fiction is simple and the style is lucid. It consists of a sense of reminiscences written in Devonshire country by a man of fifty-four years named Henry Ryecroft. Like other mortals he had lived and labored, like other mortals he has entered into the rest, says Gissing in the preface which contains the biographical sketch of the man he prefers to describe as his dead friend. However, as the narrative proceeds it unfolds many evils of poverty, its crushing effects, and commercialization of art, loneliness and alienation of a man caused by materialistic culture in a metropolis. The story is plain, clear and nondramatic. Ryecroft himself sums up his sufferings, struggle in these words”: “My life has been merely tentative, a series of false starts and hopeless beginnings.” (Ryecroft, 103)

The plot becomes clear in the very preface where Gissing describes him as miserably poor, in failing health: “Naturally a man of independent rather scornful outlook; suffered much from defeated ambition, did a lot of hack work till, long and hard struggle with unkindly circumstances he ended his life one of defeated.” (Ryecroft, i-ii) The tone never fades into the sufferings and struggle of Ryecroft but keeps the reader spell bound in the narration of the story till the end of the novel.

Gissing’s narrative fiction viewed as an aggregate of motivated units elements of characters plot devices, descriptive features, ideological framework seem to be essentially Dickensian in his early and last two novels
*Town Traveller* and *The Crown of Life* (1899) while other novels discussed above either mark departure to new forms or seem to be revising Dickens. Gissing came only gradually to an effective dramatic portrayal of crisis within the social and psychic domain. Undoubtedly, his narrative technique suits the raw materials he chooses to describe.

Gissing marshaled for scientific inspection in *The Emancipated* a miscellaneous crowd of free-livers, self-questioners and others of both sexes who had repudiated the ordinary restraints of morals and religion: in *Denzil Quarrier*, he has selected a special case for scientific study—the woman who leaves a husband convicted of felony and enters into an irregular union with the man she loves: in *The Odd Women*, the real causes of an unfortunate matrimonial alliance have scientifically been studied. *In the Year of Jubilee* and in *Eve’s Ransom*, Gissing scientifically satirizes the vulgarity and essential barbarism of the middle class, or rather stripes them naked with the Dickesonian British Philistinism: in *The Whirlpool*, he has renewed his old strength and clear-sightedness in solving moral complications on scientific lines as in *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile*: in *Human Odds and Ends* and *The Town Traveller*, Gissing satirizes the sham of the polished life with Cockney humors: in *The Crown of Life*, *Our Friend the Charlaton* and *Will Warburton*, he exposes the squalor and drudgery of the mechanized life, where the merchants had only the commodities to sell and no heart to feel.

While it may seem logical to end rather than begin by examining Gissing’s dire views on modern society, knowing the reality and extent of his pessimism about change, progress, and the value of human hope short of death determines the boundaries within which analysis of his fiction is profitable. The important question is, does Gissing think the best thing for
humans to do is give up and wait for the end, whatever that may be? Faced with this question about his fiction, one may say no. Regardless of his criticism of modern culture, Gissing is no bleak fatalist. However, his fictive world produces serious, complex interruptions of any idea of a movement toward human happiness greater than transient relief. The paradoxical position implies a, recurring hope, however faint, that he continually challenges. If hope can survive, it will have to earn its place. In this way, Gissing does not have to believe that life can be improved for the lowest classes or those who cannot fit into their ‘rightful’ places in the middle class. He has only to accept the inevitable, the logic of circumstances that leaves some in possession of their lives. Will Warburton, in the novel of the same name (1905), finds himself defrauded and de-classed but nevertheless recovers his equanimity and a sense of balance toward the past and an acceptance of the present. Korg states, “At the end of the novel Warburton is moving away from his upper-class friends, and there is the clear suggestion (somewhat surprising Gissing) that he is well rid of them” (George Gissing, 225). The future lies unknown. One wishes to label this as un-Gissing-like, but it merely transcends or shifts aside ideology. Similarly, in The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft, Gissing gives Ryecroft a legacy and peace for several years and then lets him die. Ryecroft appears to find himself blessed in his escape from the drudgeries of the writing life for even that short time. Not only the content but also the title of Gissing’s essay “The Hope of Pessimism” begins to assume a sense of clarity. A real, if chastened, idea of hope results from an acknowledgement of Gissing’s bare vision of human life.
Although it may not be progress, Gissing does not portray any Luddite leftovers acting on the edges of labour unrest. This is a significant change from the early part of the nineteenth century when breaking the looms offered a possible surcease from an advancing industrialization. Accommodation and incorporation are surely the watchwords in the 1880s and 1890s. In fact, Gissing dramatizes no serious threat to the industrial world. Its wealth permeaters the society and preempts, if not silences, alternative discussions of social change. Tom Cobb in *The Paying Guest* moves into the realm of the needed expert who, if not the manager, is vital to his firm’s success. The lower class and the lower-middle class are not only the operators of the machinery, as happened during and after the Luddite outbreaks, but they also become its technicians and engineers. Gissing makes Cobb a generic electrical worker, though Mrs. Mumford thinks of him as “the electrical engineer, or whatever he was” (39) who functions more importantly as a symbol than a specific instance of expertise. Mr. Higgins, Louise Derrick’s lower middle-class stepfather, is “rich” (14), with a business address in Fenchurch St., the city, and thus connected with the growing wealth of the country. Although he pays for Louise’s sojourn with the Mumfords, the action centers on Louise Derrick’s fruitless attempts to flee her class and/or Tom Cobb’s ardor. Gissing matter-of-factly gives Cobb “the girl,” success for the modern man without surprise at the outcome.

A fundamental consideration on the subject of progress is whether it is inevitable. Is the nineteenth century shift or change under the pressure of scientific and technological innovation battering society? Ideas on free will and determinism come to mind, and if the latter rules, would man have any say in the event, whether the result is considered good or bad? Richard
Mutimer’s inheritance in *Demos* transforms Wanley into New Wanley, and the discovery of an earlier will just as surely shifts it back. Is Hubert Eldon, the later beneficiary, any more in control of the destruction of the works at New Wanley than Mutimer is in their creation? Gissing’s use of the hackneyed device of a will to move the plot may have more significance than is usually the case since its importance lies not so much in its effects on Eldon’s financial prospects but rather on the effects on science’s inevitable march to social dominance. Gissing appears to reverse the century’s determining forces and suspend technology from its position of mastery. Dickens’ images of technological harm in *Hard Times* (1854) Coketown with its air and water pollution, and the general adaptation of that city, in its pervasive drabness, to the factory, train, and scientific educational methods lie upended in Wanley Valley’s newly recreated, pristine environment. Gissing makes Eldon most enthusiastic in his planned, complete eradication of the mines and the works.

But despite an apparent hostile attitude towards science, Gissing prefers to be known as a scientific artist; and, in fact, it is almost a truism to pronounce that it has been his avowed aim like George Moore’s to write fiction on scientific lines. There is, of course, a scientific impartiality, as, for instance, when he explains Mutimer, he draws up what he calls a tabular exposition of the man’s consciousness, and sets forth the motives impelling or restraining his ambitious democrat, who is on the point of breaking with Emma Vine, the girl of his own class, and marrying the genteel Adela. Such type of scientific objectivity and analysis entitles him to the rank of a scientific novelist, despite his distrust in and hatred against scientific principles; and, in any serious attempt at tracing this positive influence of
science on him, even an iota of doubt cannot be raised against his being not a true scientific novelist.

Notwithstanding the fact that he regarded science as a darkening force to contaminate man’s vision and to harden his heart, a vicious factor to bring a time of vast conflicts, which will pale into insignificance ‘the thousand wars of the old’, he was never averse to the truth reckoned by scientific inquiry and curiosity; and in this respect, he even excels Mark Rutherford and George Moore.