CHAPTER – III

THE EARLY NOVELS

Writing in an age of scientific theories, George Gissing fully recognized the impact of Darwinism and its varied implications: the theory of Uniformitarianism and also the genetic theory made him believe the scientific existence of mankind. To his scientific knowledge, the influences of Zola, Balzac, Flaubert, the Goncourt and Maupassant added a kaleidoscopic vision and depth of life, often resembling those of Dostoevsky’s and Dante’s. His view of determinism as the law of existence is that of Schopenhauer, where he intrudes in his studies of the conscience at bay, to elucidate the thoughts and half-conscious motives, to trace the process of causation determining issues, even in the most trivial and sordid shapes. Social and cultural aspects are central to the study of Gissing’s novels. The society, which Gissing presents and subsequently criticizes, is marked by the impact of scientific thought and imperatives of an acute and crushing class-consciousness in an individualistic, yet still archaic social order. Culture for Gissing signified an inward condition of knowledge, transcending the inadequacies of existing class interests and ideologies. It was also a socially constitutive feature of his own struggle for existence, materially bound up with the realities of class difference and inherited privilege.(Sloan, 9) Writing specifically about Gissing’s social novels, Raymond Williams has suggested that, “Anyone now in Gissing’s position or in one resembling it, can gain from a critical reading of these social novels, in their exposure of a number of prejudices and
false positions, towards which this situation by its own pressures urges them.”(Williams, 178)

In his earlier novels beginning with Workers in the Dawn (1880) to The Nether World (1889) his presentation and criticism of the scientific thoughts in society is flinching. As Mr. Tollady, Arthur Golding’s Surrogate father and guide in Workers in the Dawn through the ‘urban inferno’ gives voice:

Be a successor of Hogarth, and give us the true image of our social dress, as he did of those of his own day. Paint them as you see them, and get your picture hung in the Academy. It would be a moral lesson to all who looked upon it, surpassing in value every sermon the fanaticism has ever concocted. (164)

Mr. Tollady’s morality of art is directed to the realistic presentation of society. It occupies Gissing in most of his working class novels. Writing on Gissing’s realism in his article “Morrison, Gissing, and the Stark Reality” Roger Henkle says, “The frustration and anger manifests itself, in its clinically repressed form ... frustration and anger over social inequality, the futility of revolution, the diminution of passion, the sterility of cultural experience.”(Henkle, 319)

Gissing in his novels has essentially presented the lives of the classes viz. working class, middle or upper middle class and third one who by virtue of intellect and possession belongs to no class but ‘nether world’. Dickens has dealt with the final two classes but Gissing in his working class novel specifically in The Nether World, The Unclassed has also dealt with a class of people who exist ‘outside the limbo of the society, yet they are part of the social reality.
Gissing’s first novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), is an attack on Victorian ideals of progress, social reform and scientific thoughts. The renewed class antagonisms of the 1870s and the re-entry of the working classes into political arena, the check to lower class aspirations resulted from the increasing fragmentation and specialization of social and intellectual life form the subject of attack. These forces are reflected in the frustrations of the ‘declass’ hero, Arthur Golding, and in the failure of the middle class heroine’s, philanthropic ideal of reform through education.

The working class social values are subject to abject poverty. The very opening chapter of *Workers in the Dawn* presents the lives of people in filth, putrefaction and poverty: “The fronts of the houses decayed, filthy, ... straining the eyes into horrible darkness, we behold a alley, the unspeakable abominations of which are dimly suggested by a gas lamp flickering at the end.”(3-4) The street market of Barbican has been presented not as one particular part of London but rather a social evil symptomatic of a diseased society. The people who throng the market have been presented in terms of debased qualities.

The environment—which Gissing presents here, is that of working class society. The tradesmen “abuse each other with a foul-mouthed virulence surpassing description.”(8) The crowd around stall are miserable looking wretches’, and bundles of second hand clothes ‘piled up in foul and clammy heaps’ attract buyers who “ogle the paltry rags, feverishly turn their money in their hands, discuss with each other in greedy whispers the Cheapness or otherwise of the wares” (9) There is a little girl ‘the very image of naked wretchedness, holding with shirt, pitiful appeals, a large piece of salt for which she wants one half penny’. Focusing on the domestic circumstances of these people the novelist says,
“Failure to sell her salt will involve a brutal beating when she returns to the foul nest which she calls home.” (11) Such social environment cannot deliver well but it breaks evils such as “the working lad to spend a shilling for the delight of some consumptive girl’, and leading a working girl to seek in the brothel a relief from the slow death of the factory or the work-room.” (12)

One of the cardinal tenets of Darwinism is the struggle for existence culminating in the survival of the fittest: the stronger species or genus annihilate by way of eating or destruction or otherwise the weaker ones: the smaller fish is engulfed by the bigger one because it is a natural law of evolution. In the struggle of existence only the stronger ones survive: the weaker species automatically become extinct; and in their stead the existing ones evolve further to get their comfortable adjustment to their natural surroundings and environment. Amongst the lower species this struggle is not so complicated and complex as it is in the higher species. Amongst human beings, this struggle for existence is rather more complex and intense than animals. Gissing accepts this aspect of Darwinism in Toto; and in his fiction, there is the fullest manifestation of this principle and it is why his philosophy is also termed as the philosophy of natural living. This struggle of the existence is shown in his fiction by the class-consciousness. Most of “Class-conscious” characters of Gissing seek the best outside their own class, and when their search appears to be frustrated they turn back to the very worst within their own social group. In *Workers in the Dawn* Arthur Golding seeks ‘aesthetic pleasure’ outside the toiling life of the working class environment. Arthur does not belong to working class by birth. It is by an accident that he grows up in working class society. His father is an Oxford Graduate who dies of alcoholism in the slums. His upbringing is entirely so. A friend of
his dead father takes him to stay in the country but after a brief period Arthur returns to London streets. At this stage of life he is totally illiterate but slums have not corrupted him,

Arthur had already several times given indications of what in a child of higher birth we might, perhaps, be allowed to call chivalrous feeling ... from other boys of his position by a certain want of brutality, and absence of Vulgar selfishness.

(141)

It is at his own inclination that he learns to read and write and later on he develops his talent as an artist. Arthur Golding is not a working class character in taste and habits. Though he was brought up in the slums he does not show any of the characteristics of the working class man. Gissing in a letter to his family members wrote: “It is a novel.... of social questions, and the principal characters are earnest young people striving for improvement in, as it were, the dawn of a new phase of our civilization.”(Letters, 153)

Arthur Golding’s sudden acquisition of wealth and his subsequent dilemma whether he should devote his energy and money to social work or to develop his artistic talent may be seen as conflicts between public and private codes of values. Symbolically Arthur’s moral dilemma is his own movements between class-consciousness and self-consciousness. We see him earlier as a committed social worker but the sudden acquisition of wealth leaves him more occupied with aesthetic pleasures.

However, Arthur shows qualities of upper class in his taste and habits, in education but the social trap that envelops him is inevitable. He cannot escape the realities of the slum. When Arthur Golding returns to White cross Street he lives with Bill Blatherwick and his mother because he knows no other home. There he is trained to sing hymns as a pathetic
companion to the phony street beggar. In drunken fits the Blatter wicks Starve and torture him until he is rescued by Ned Quirk. Drunkenness and sadism are shown to be accepted features of Blather wicks’ way of life. They have no streak of humanity in them. They testify to the strong influence of Dickens upon Gissing, recalling as they do the black portraits of the workhouse crones in *Oliver Twist*.

The Christmas Scene in *Workers in the Dawn* is another example of Arthur’s class-consciousness as he stands outside commenting on the feast. The feast becomes an ‘orgy’ - “the merry making insensate drunkenness, and the warm feeling of humanity towards other a begrudging selfishness.”(3) Christmas in the Pettindund household cannot possibly be a time when the better side of human nature comes to the fore. It is because here there is only bestiality and that becomes open.

Gissing explains the intricate customs. The Pettindund enroll in the ‘goose’ and the ‘grocer’s club’. They manage to save a pound a week out of their meagre family Income, gradually pawn every inessential, and even procure a loan on the security of their house and furniture. The preliminaries are completed and the family rests: “It was like the diver taking a long breath before he springs into the water, like the athlete reposing his sinews for a moment before he tries enormous effects of strength.” (292) On the Christmas Eve the orgy begins, with the Pettindunds and their guests pausing only to sleep off the effects of their continuous eating, drinking, dancing and fighting. They come out hurling abuses on each other. Arthur Golding comments: “Don’t such blackguards as these give good cause to the upper classes to speak of us working men with contempt? I warrant they waste as much money in guzzling and swilling as would give twenty or thirty poor starving wretches a good dinner for a week to come.” (113) Arthur Golding in his
class-consciousness presents different sensibilities from his fellows. Carrie Mitchell, the wife of Arthur Golding is herself opposite to her husband in her taste and sensibilities. To her Arthur’s aesthetic pursuits, his social commitments carry no meaning.

Arthur like Waymark, Casti, and the working class characters in *The Unclassed* is displaced intellectual, who struggles against the forces of the society and his own fate. Here environment does not seem to corrupt them. Thyrza is another example. Growing among the working class people, working with them in hat making factory, she seems to be different from her. It is sensibility, ambition, and aesthetic sense, which distinguish these characters from their relatives. However, such characters in Gissing grow up as snobs, disliking their own class, developing a sense of hatred for their own fellow beings. They show a keen desire to cross the class barriers, which is always disastrous. In this struggle for existence, as per the thoughts of Darwinism only the strongest one survives.

In *Workers in the Dawn*, Helen Norman has been presented as an ideal woman. She is not only beautiful but also possesses sharp intellect and aesthetic sense. She is herself a slum worker but for her exceptional virtue and sensitivity she stands outside the working class way of life, and slums seem to have played no part in the formation of her character. Gissing says, “She much resembled some sweet and placid faced Madonna gazing herself on beatific reverie before an infant Christ.” (170) Helen decided to dedicate her life to the cause of emancipation of the slum workers and she never let her moral down. P.J. Keating rightly comments, “Helen Norman has been a goddess. Supremely beautiful, virtuous, intellectual, wealthy, irreligious and possessed a strong social
conscience. She was in class terms far above Arthur Golding.”(Keating, 68)

Helen’s religion of humanity, agnosticism, rational believes co-
relation of ethics and aesthetic artistic contemplation has been shaped by
her study of Arnold, Comte, Darwin and Schopenhauer. Helen’s reformist
zeal and intellectualism fail to achieve success in the cause of her reform.
John Sloan rightly observes, “Workers in the Dawn exposes the in-
adequacy of its heroine’s reformist programme and attempts to achieve an
intellectual autonomy.”(Sloan, 23)

The failure of the reformist programme in no way shows the
weakness of Helen’s honesty of purpose. Helen’s secular mission to the
East End is presented in terms of that spirit of sympathy and conscience,
which provided a contemporary rational for social reform and missionary
movements throughout the 1870s. Though honesty of Helen’s purpose
may not be questioned but it is her sense of the horrible difference of
caste, which daunts and finally marks the failure of her ‘sanguine hopes
of reform’.

They will not trust me. My speech, my dress, perhaps,
revolts them. They think that I don’t belong to their class,
and though they take my money, it is with a suspicion of my
motives. I have made my dress as plain as it possibly can be
to be respectable. If I could, I would even speak in their
uncouth tongue. There is always that horrible difference of
caste between us. (26)

In Workers in the Dawn the portrait of Carrie Mitchell has been
pitched against Helen’s. Carrie is representative of the working class
crudities and environment. Gissing portrays her in these words: “She was
emphatically a child of the town, dreaming of nothing but it gross
delights, seeing in everything pure and lovely but a sapless image of some town made joy.” (371)

Carrie Mitchell is wife of Arthur Golding a man of aesthetic taste and refined culture. Arthur’s yearning for art has been, symbolically presented as his craving for ‘ethereal Helen’. The differences between the two women are not of beauty and wealth but of culture. To Carrie Mitchell Arthur’s moral dilemma is meaningless. It is Helen Norman who eventually makes up his mind.

Arthur’s marriage to Carrie Mitchell and his yearning for Helen bring the ruin to Arthur and degradation to Carrie Mitchell. His marriage to Carrie is doomed as much as by his nature as by that of her. The mixed motive of social pity and sexual attraction that lead to the marriage conflict are nullified by her relapse into drunkenness and prostitution, a fall which is partly due to habit but also in a large degree to the boredom and frustration brought about by Golding’s attempts to make her worthy of himself:

At first he had always taken Care with her when he went on these evening walks, but by degrees her commonplace character, here vulgarisms of thought and language, her utter insensibility to the impressions of the season and the hour, rendered her company at such times intolerable to him. (289)

Arthur’s attempts to educate Carrie to make her worthy of himself fails because she is not receptive of Arthur’s education but grows as the slum environment has shaped her sensibilities and instincts. Indeed it is Carrie’s own acceptance of her cultural inadequacy, which forces her into war not only with an oppressive society but also with herself.

Carrie Mitchell’s hold over Arthur Golding was largely sexual; as the attraction grows faint the bond is severed. Helen refuses in spite of
her constant praise of the free and unconventional life to live with Golding while his wife is alive. He returns to Carrie. Helen’s purity, her senses of strong social conscience is the strength of her morally bold personality. On the contrary Carrie Mitchell’s weaker social conscience and low cultural background make her vulnerable to evils. Carrie Mitchell has striking similarities with Nell Harrison, Gissing’s first wife. Carrie is a bad woman who due to her low culture and working class is hostile. (Coustillas, 132-33)

In his second novel, *The Unclassed*, Gissing finds that new civilization is based on science’s root of barbarism, the callousness of heart and the seeds of all beastly conflicts. In the beginning of the novel we find that Miss Rutherford is a middle-aged lady, grave at all times, kindly, and, be it added, fairly competent as things go in the world of school. She was running a school in Lisson Grove, in the north-west of London; a spot not to be pictured from its name by those ignorant of the locality; in point of fact a dingy street, with a mixture of shops and private houses. On the front door was a plate displaying Miss Rutherford’s name, nothing more. In the opening scene of the novel we find that Ida Starr had blown Harriet Smales at his head. Ida was dismissed from the school for this offence. Her mother was admitted in the hospital when she found that her dreams scattered now. Miss Bygrave, the aunt of Ida Starr’s classmate Maud, pointed out that the life on this earth is sin and that’s why she did not want to celebrate Christmas. She described the world in the following way:

“And this,” said Miss Bygrave, “is why I think it wrong to make Christmas a time of merriment. In the true Christian, every enjoyment, which comes from the body, is a sin. If you feel you like this or that, it is a sign that you must renounce it, give it up. If you feel fond of life, you
must force yourself to hate it; for life is sin. Life is given to us that we may conquer ourselves. We are placed in the midst of sin that we may struggle against its temptations. There is temptation in the very breath you draw; since you feel a dread if it is checked. You must live so as to be ready at any moment to give up your life with gladness, as a burden, which it has been appointed you to bear for a time. There is temptation in the love you feel for those around you; it makes you cling to life; you are tempted to grieve if you lose them, whereas death is the greatest blessing in the gift of God. And just because it is so, we must not snatch at it before our time; it would be a sin to kill ourselves, since that would be to escape from the tasks set us. Many pleasures would seem to be innocent, but even these it is better to renounce, since for that purpose does every pleasure exist. I speak of the pleasures of the world. One joy there is which we may and must pursue, the joy of sacrifice. The more the body suffers, the greater should be the delight of the soul; and the only moment of perfect happiness should be that when the world grows dark around us, and we feel the hand of death upon our hearts.”(48)

In this novel also Gissing shows the lives of working class people and the impact of science on their lives. Most of the readers are made aware of the evils of slum society through the occasional appearance of a symbolic slum inhabitant called slimy. He is hardly human at all, he stands for the virulent slum society:

Leaning on the counter, in one of the compartments, was something which a philanthropist might perhaps have had courage to claim as a human being; a very tall creature, with bent shoulders, and head seeming to go straight out of its chest, the thick grizzled hair hiding almost every vestige of feature with exception of dreadful red eye, its fellow being dead and sightless. (65)
Slimy appears first in a pub scrounging drinks. When the rent collector calls he is lying on a bare stead in his filthy room, surrounded by the junk he has collected. Later he is shown standing on his head in the gutter singing songs for money, and being tormented by street urchins who hurl mud into his open mouth. When Waymark calls to collect the rent Slimy attacks him, takes the money and goes out to drink himself to death. Slimy’s role in *The Unclassed* is almost identical with that of Tom-All Alone’s in Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1853). He symbolizes all the uncertainties, ignorance, distress and latent violence of an unknown world. P.J. Keating rightly comments: “In *The Unclassed* the slum is a power that cannot be neglected. Like Slimy it can reach out and suddenly strike all society, and at its most dangerous when ignored.” (Keating, 77)

In *The Unclassed*, Waymark, an aspiring novelist, university educated, supplements a small private income by working first as schoolteacher then as a rent collector of the slums. He aspires for a lady above his class for marriage one of the weaknesses of Gissing’s male protagonists is the desire for a lady of refined culture. John Halperin calls it ‘Obsessive’ with Gissing’s ‘most of the protagonists.’

Through such characters and their introspections Gissing does not only focus on their psyche but reveals one of the cruel facts of the society. His moral is direct. In a class divided society human desires, sensitivity carry little meaning. Marriages are socially determined by factors beyond one’s personality. Gissing’s own comment on such characters is “... earnest young people striving for improvement in, as it were the dawn of the new phase of our civilization.” (*Letters*, 153) Poverty, low cultural achievements and painful strivings of young people for improvement are some of the basic aspects presented by Gissing in his
depiction of the working class society. He saw poverty as an integral part of an entrenched social order. The social order, with all the evils it produced seemed to be an expression of an established order to powerful for the human resources to resist. As Mr Tollady says in *Workers in the Dawn*, “History pursues its path, using us as its agents for the working of prescribed ends. To thank that a man can modify those ends is the delusion of the ignorance or madness.” (161)

Gissing’s working class society in contrast with middle class society is laden with static values. Characters live as they have been decreed to live with the system. Gissing is critical of this tendency because he finds them difficult to resist the status quo. As Jacob Korg rightly persists, “He did not sympathize with the poor in their barbarity, because he knew that they preferred their way of life and would resist change.”(Korg, 114)

On the contrary, in *The Unclassed* we see both heredity and environment work on the development of character of Ida Starr. Ida as a student of Miss Rutherford’s school in Lisson-grove is taunted by one of the girls that her mother is a bad woman. She strikes the girl with a slate on her head. Ida is expelled from the school. When her mother asks the reason of her expulsion she reveals it to her mother.

Ida’s mother gets a shock, as she did not want that the child should learn about her profession. She didn’t want to malign her mind and she was full of cares that she must have good education and nothing may sully her young mind. Ida’s mother dies and misery befell on her, which through a series of unfortunate events of poverty, misery led her to be ‘mistress of a young man, son of the lady in whose house she served’. (189). To Ida this life is too short lived. She becomes a prostitute quite conscious of her unfortunate class.
Ida’s fate, her breach of morality may be seen as composite of her heredity, environment and miseries from which she sees no escape. Maud Enderby to whom Ida Starr succumbs as his mistress to escape from her misery symbolizes the vicious social environment. John Sloan rightly comments: “Like Dickens’ model heroines, the heroines of Gissing’s novel’s of 1880s are generally innocent figures, oppressed by circumstances in a harsh and hostile world.” (Sloan, 44) Ida Starr in The Unclassed is orphaned and forced into prostitution before being befriended by Waymark. Emily Hood is hounded, by the capitalist, Dagworthy, in A Life’s Morning, and more refined Adela Waltham, the last innocent of Wanley fall temporarily under Mutimer, the violent working class demagogue of Demos.

The lack of parental cares of harmonious family environment lead to split personalities of many self-conscious protagonists in Gissing’s novels. Pierre Coustillas in his article “Gissing’s - The Reminiscences of His Father” has pointed out that Gissing was himself a victim of the early demise of his father. Coustillas sees its reflection on many of Gissing’s protagonists. (Coustillas, 463)

His next novel Demos presents the immutability of class distinction and the futility of democratic movement. The hero Richard Mutimer an artisan and socialist has virtues of a good man. But sudden acquisition of wealth from his relative makes him a wealthy man and the defects of his characters become glaring. Under the influence of prosperity he is led into one or two distinct breach of morality of which the worst is casting off the girl he was engaged to marry. Possessed of wealth, he loyally devotes his money to the cause of democracy, starts mining works on his estate upon thoroughgoing socialistic principles. Mutimer, the “Zealous champion of the oppressed wage - earning class” (29), becomes a
capitalist. The change simply brings out what good or bad is in him by removing restraints. He is feverishly anxious for vulgar applause, personal prominence, in order to associate himself with the class, which he denounced so strongly earlier? “Richard Mutimer’s betrayal of his socialist principles is symbolic of the misguided and ultimately hopeless revolutionary aspirations of the people”, (Keating, 77) comments P.J. Keating.

In a very real sense Richard Mutimer is the essence of Demos. In him Gissing embodies the democratic and socialist movement. He may appear to be superior to his working class background. But when put to pressures the discovery of missing will ousts him from possession. House, lands, and money pass into the hands of an aristocratic idealist called Herbert Eldon. Ruined and defeated Mutimer is put to hard pressures. In such moments the very worst aspects of his personality come to the fore, and the upper class life he covets is seen to be totally unattainable. The main point Gissing is making about Mutimer is that he is ‘an incomplete human being’. He is tainted by his class background to such a degree that the positive qualities he possesses are destroyed by the negative qualities he is incapable of correcting. The central message is that working classes are incapable of any meaningful kind of material or intellectual development.

However, not all characters have been realized in the above light. This idea is fully realized as the action Centers on the symbolic figure of Mutimer but breaks down when minor working class characters are introduced. They are types who epitomize specific working class qualities. Mutimer’s brother Arry is described as representing ‘a very large section of Demos’· (95). He is by name and nature a ‘street layabout’, ‘a Wastrel’ for whom inherited money can do nothing but
harm. The same is true of Alice Mutimer, the pretty working class snob to whom money will bring only discontent. Another type is represented by Daniel Dahbs, “the proletarian pure and simple”:

A man of immense strength, but bull-necked and altogether ungainly - his heavy fist with its black veins and terrific knuckles... the stumpy fingers, enraged hopelessly, and the filthy broken nail’s showed, how he wrought for a living.” (31)

The family group consisting of Emmavine, Kateclay and the dying child Jane present similar representative figures. Emma Vine is the idealized ignorant girl who clings to Mutimer inspite of his cruelty and Kateclay represents the mean - minded side of working class womanhood.

_Demos_ as ‘a tale of English Socialism presents another representative Mr. Wyvern. Mr. Wyvern was once a badly paid curate, working in a wretched parish. The sight of misery around him made him a socialist. But gradually he has ‘outgrown it’. His old zeal only lingers in the form of tolerance. He ‘can enter into the mind of a furious proletarian as easily as into the feeling which you (the aristocratic Hurbert London) represent.’ (106) He is content that the world should in substance remain as it is. Many shades of Socialism appear in _Demos_. Sidney Webb, one of the ablest socialist theoreticians of the time thinks this power could be exercised by means of collective administration of economic system, government control of means of production and subordination of the individual interests to the good of the community as a whole.

The socialists presented in their characteristic moods in the public meetings, ‘hoodlums hired’, and undisciplined mob which swarms around such meetings have been presented by Gissing in Demos. A contemporary unsigned review commented: “The Sketch of the one or
two socialist meetings which the author has occasion to describe, of the style of socialist literature, and of the conversation of socialist agitators show an intimate knowledge of that field of action.” (Spectator, 486-7)

The behavior of Mutimer on the platform with his attitudes of self-criticism, devotion, and quasi-religious fervor, the ‘Swift Emotional responses of the noisy, uncontrollable audience have life if their own: “The impassioned Mr. Cullen and Mr. Cowes rise like comic twins to subject the meeting to their oratory, disagreeing violently in public, but drinking peacefully together in private.” Describing these public meetings of socialists Gissing says, “Some one tickles the mob’s sense of honor some one else arises its passion, and the session ends in an uproar.” (70)

In February 1886, when Demos was being written, a huge meeting of the social Democratic Federation in Trafalgar was turned into a disorderly mob as its leaders tried to lead the crowd up the Pall Mall Hyde Park. Stones were thrown, windows broken, shops looted. For a moment it seemed “as the country were on the brink of revolution.” (Socialism, 138) Gissing describes a similar scene Mutimer is attacked at a meeting he is addressing, and he uses this ‘occasion’ to comment ironically on the character of the common people and the political movement:

The meetings were over; the riot had begun. Picture them, the indignant champion of honesty, the averages of virtues defamed! Demos was roused, was tired of a listening to more articulate speech; it was a time for good wild beast roar, for a taste of bloodshed... on all sides was the thud of blows, the indignant shouting of the few who desired to preserve order mingled with the clamour of those who combated. Demos were saving his way, civilization was blotted out, and club law proclaimed. (354-55)
The distrust of action of the socialists led him to disapprove of socialism as a means salvation to the poor. He brought the message home that socialism or democracy cannot change society unless people are educated and trained to use their rights and privileges. One of the real life experiences is significant in the context of Gissing’s ideas on contemporary socialists. William Morris an active socialist and founder of Socialist League (1884) were arrested. Some of the members of the League were arrested at the street corner meeting. Next day when they appeared before the court, there was disturbance in which Morrison was also involved. Gissing reacting to this incident wrote irritably to his brother.

What the evil is such a man doing in that gallery? .... Why cannot he write poetry in the shade? He will inevitably coarsen himself in the company of ruffians. Keep apart, keep apart, and preserve one’s soul alike that is the teaching for the day. It is ill to have been born in these times, but one can make a world within the world. (*Letters*, 169)

In *Demos* Gissing has successfully dealt with ‘an amply documented actuality, the early development of the Socialist movement in England’. John Goode In his article “Gissing, Morris, and English Socialism”, says ‘Demos’, historical accuracy can be specifically related to anti-socialist ideological trends in the eighties.”(Goode, 203) He further adds, “Moreover, as a story of socialism, Demos is close to the actuality.” (209)

The whole principles of the capitalist system of employment’ has been attacked by Mutimer. Alan Lalchuk one of the sympathetic critics of Gissing says, “Indeed no other working class hero in nineteenth century English fiction is as incisive or powerful critic of industrial capitalism as Richard Mutimer.”(Lalchuk, 363) Mutimer is a worker of great socialist
conviction. He has also a programme through which he wants to convert his socialist vision into some kind of workable reality. His experiment is different from the socialism as he explains it of Westlake: “It will differ considerably from the socialist experiments we know of we shall be working not only to support ourselves, but every bit as much set on profit as any capitalist in Belwick. The difference is that the profit will benefit no individual but the cause.” (108-9) The New Wanley scheme involves co-operative economy, better working conditions and mass involvement in the production. It envisages decent housing, improved working conditions in the collieries and iron works. General welfare benefits like health care are implemented. Through the means of union (headed by Mutimer), the workers themselves own the means of production. The economies of the operation are run on a mixed basis incorporating capitalist means - incentives, reinvestment of profit-making) towards socialists ends. John Goode identifies Gissing’s concept of co-operative economy with Jane Morris’s Socialism. Alan Lelchuk another Gissing’s critic identifies Mutimer’s community with Robert Owen: “The kinds of Co-operative experiments in industry and living that were flourishing in England beginning in the 1830s, the result of Owen’s famous success at New Lanark in 1816.”(Lalchuk, 366)

In Demos, Eldon the noble lady who is to become the victim of the mob’s brutality after the culture of New Wanley, talks very much in class terms: “What is the class distinction upon which we pride our selves? What does it mean; if not that our opportunities lead us to see truths to which the eyes of the poor and ignorant are blind?” (39) Her son is explicit that the relationship between classes is necessarily one of antagonism.
“I have nothing of the enthusiasm of humanity . . .”, he explains to Adela, “you will clothe your working people better, you will give them better food and more leisure; in doing so you injure the class that has finer sensibilities and give power to the class which not only postpones everything to material well-being, but more and more regards intellectual refinement as an obstacle in the way of progress.” (32-33)

Even the heroine, Adela recognizes her own alienation from her husband in purely a struggle for existence: “It was the face of a man by birth and breeding altogether beneath her.... He was not of her class, not of her world, only by violent wrenching of the laws of nature had they come together ....” (54). In Richard Mutimer’s words: “I go back to London a mechanical engineer in search of employment.” And Gissing’s reactions to these words are: “they were the truest words’! He had ever uttered, they characterized him, classed him” (55) show the strong class-consciousness of Gissing’s characters. Helen’s distrust of the working class people (Workers in the Dawn) shows the horrible difference of the caste: “They think that I don’t belong to their class” (26).

In Thyrza too people ‘swarm around’ hat-making factory. Gissing shows that employment is a great problem. In The Unclassed for the vast multiple of humanely there is scarce work as we see Casti, Waymark, Ida and Slimy keep on changing their works. Slimy is virtually unemployed, he earns money by doing odd jobs around the street- “standing on his head in the gutter singing songs for pennies.”(169) Julian Casti, an author ‘unpractical and shadowy’ hero of The Unclassed resembles with Mr. Reardon, the hero of The New Grub Street. Casti’s ideal directs him to keep himself aloof from the ‘Vulgarity of the market’. As John Sloan
Comments: “his work is seen in the novel not as anachronism but as spiritual labour heroically opposed to the market.”(Sloan, 35) On the contrary Waymark’s recognition of the material basis of culture directs him not to oppose the system but to join it: “I was bent on an intellectual life foresoth, couldn’t see that the natural order of things was to make money first and the intellectual afterward.”(54) The suppression of culture and the poetic spirit by circumstances specifically by the need to earn money characterize the intellectual characters like Waymark and Casti in *The Unclassed*. *Demos* is replete with diatribes on the problems of unemployment, wages of the working classes. Richard Mutimer’s these words to Miss Walthan touch on the contemporary problem of wages and work:

The man who lives on wages is never free; he sells himself body and soul to his employer. What sort of freedom does a man enjoy who may any day find himself and his family on the point of starvation just because he has lost his work? (96) Gissing attacks the inhuman working conditions and the working hours in industries as exploitation of workers. This capitalist system of employment has been criticized by Gissing in *Demos* through Mutimer:

He gets home, say, at six o’clock, tired out; he has to be up again perhaps at five next morning. What can he do but just lie about half asleep? Why, that’s the whole principle of the capitalist system of employment, it’s calculated exactly how long a man can be made to work in a day without making him incapable of beginning again on the day following just - as it is calculated exactly how little a man can live upon wages. (96)
The traditional response both to bad housing and underemployment was philanthropy. As John Goode in introduction to the Harvester edition of *The Nether World* adds: “The Nether World as a whole turns on the distinctive futility of philanthropy.” (ix) It had become very clear by late seventies, following the depression which began in 1875, that industrial capitalism could only survive the vicissitudes of the world market if it could have an ‘industrial reserve army’. And except for the brief moments of full production there would always be areas of society, which bore the brunt of those vicissitudes.

The crisis of philanthropism, which Gissing presented through Arthur Golding in *Workers in the Dawn*, Richard Mutimer (Demos) is pitched on the duplicity of the characters. Their association with the poor class and philanthropic spirit has been called ‘negative identification’ by Raymond Williams. He himself puts the best description of it into the mouth of Waymark in *The Unclassed*:

> The Zeal on behalf of the suffering masses was nothing more or less than disguised zeal on behalf of my own starved passion. I was poor and desperate, life had no pleasure ... I identified myself with the poor and ignorant; I did not make their cause my own, but my own cause theirs. (186)

This is the negative identification which we see in Arthur Golding’s moral dilemma, in the ‘adolescent socialism and radicalism’ of Richard Mutimer. Gissing attacks the so-called philanthropism.

In *The Nether World* (1889) Gissing’s bitter portrayal of the soup kitchen established by the ‘society’ which ‘entrusted its practical conduct to very practical people is satirical. (251) The soup kitchen, which stood as an epitome of philanthropic enterprises, turned out to be a place of corruption. Mr. and Mrs. Batterhy supplied rotten and unhygienic peas, for
soup and made ‘stock’ out of sheep and ‘bullock’s heads.’ (251) Jane Snowdon joined the soup-kitchen by assisting them out of her philanthropic zeal but when she discovered the irregularities in the name of philanthropy “her brief period of joy and confidence was followed by a return of anxiety which no resource could suppress.” (253) As the novelist earlier says: “It was with anything but a cheerful heart that Jane went through this initiation into philanthropic life.” (253)

Gissing shows the destructive futility of philanthropism. It was mostly used by the capitalists and politicians to serve their own ends. In *Thyrza* Walter Egremont who has started a series of lectures for educating working classes in the suburb of Lambeth for their emancipation finds his cause too idealistic to succeed in a capitalist world. Egremont during his two years stay in America discovers the futility of his idealistic philanthropism. His exposure to this reality like that of Wyvern in *Demos* is out of his experience. He learns about the case of Cornelivanderbilt, a social reformer and capitalist. A man who is “personally disgusting, ignorant, a base, a boor in his manner, a blackguard, yet the man was a great philanthropist.” (311) Gissing further puts it ironically; the industries which he established “brought great good to working class by giving them employment.” “What is the state of the world?” asks Engremont, in “which such man can do such good by such means.” (312) He realized that a man who wields power and pelf can even purchase the noble cause of philanthropy. Dalmaine, the self-interested pushing politician in *Thyrza* like Mutimer (*Demos*) is more interested in gaining political mileage than carrying forward genuine philanthropy. Gissing exposes such persons who use philanthropy as means to personal advancement: “These men are practical philanthropists and to sneer at
them is very much the same as to speak contemptuously of the rain-shower which adds the growth of the com.” (326)

One of the contemporary ideologies that Gissing presents is Socialism. He was not a socialist but he was a moralist who sought to move the reader by the power of his descriptions of conditions of the poor. As Stephan Ingle puts it “George Gissing though he probably would not intend or desired it fulfilled such a task.” (Ingle, 18) Gissing like many British intellectual was influenced by August Comte’s Positivistic philosophy. Especially during the first years of 1880s the idea of an immutable social order never left him. The central theme, which emerges from his novels, is that life tends to be miserable and there is little man can do about it. Swinge Wood points out that Gissing’s novel contains “no hint of the great events of 1880s, the rapid development of trade unionism and escalation of industrial conflict.’ (Wood, 129) Gissing does not discuss these movements directly but one sees the shades of these movements in the *Demos* in his treatment of socialist ideas and their significance.

In *Demos* Richard Mutimer, the hero presents the crisis of Socialism of eighties in his life. The development of his character as an artisan, socialist, and then sudden acquisition of wealth and his sudden change in attitude to Socialism has been presented as the hollowness of contemporary Socialism. Mutimer puts his new wealth into an Owenite rural industrial community, which fails. Its failure has been seen as the follies of the working class people. Mutimer is convinced that the working class is incapable of self-improvement. “Our opportunities”, says Eldon’s mother, “lead us to see truths to which the eyes of the poor and ignorant are blind” (21). Mutimer too sees the working classes as if they are beyond improvement:
You can work upon the mind of the people you talk with and get them to throwaway their prejudices. The cause of the working classes seems so hopeless just because they are too far away to catch the cares of those who oppose them. (99)

Eldon’s Tory democracy: ‘To individual poor man or woman I would give my last penny. It is when they rise against me ‘as a class that I become pitiless.’” (67) Gissing sees the failure of Socialism as an unsigned review in *The Times* commented: “If Demos suggests a practical moral, it is the modern socialist is insincere.”(5)

In *Thyrza*, Egremont is conscious of his class and knows that marring a working class girl Thyrza would be hazardous: “We knew what miseries had again and again resulted from marriages such as this”. (444) John Goode rightly comments: “There is no attempt to discern a classless human reality beneath the accidents of social status (as for example in Mrs Gaskell) and no attempt to find a definition of culture which transcends class.”(Goode, 216)

In *Thyrza* also Gissing shows the struggle for existence between his characters in which only the stronger one survive. Thyrza’s self-consciousness comes through her realization that her desire for marriage with Walter Egremont, a capitalist (who comes to deliver lectures to educate the working classes) is ethereal in a society governed by strong class feelings. Thyrza’s desire to marry Egremont may be seen as her desire of fulfillment of her ambition to rise above her class. She refuses Gilbert Grail’s (a working class man) offer and finally discovers that Egremont’s love for her was nothing more than an infatuation and her longings for Egremont her whims, a dream. Broken in heart, she dies after this realization. However, Mrs Ormonde, a philanthropic lady who
gives shelter to Thyrza and who is also well known to Egremont is conscious of the class factor. She feels that this marriage would bring ‘ruin to Thyrza and degradation to Egremont’. (108)

Mrs. Ormonde thinks that Thyrza is not educated and she is not worthy to be Egremont’s wife, a son of an industrialist and educated from Oxford. She must be educated. Egremont too wants her to be educated so that she could be a match for him. When Walter Egremont leaves abroad in connection with business for a long period Thyrza takes ‘every attempt to make herself worthy of his wife.’ (103) Egremont finding that his library system - organizing lectures to educate people has failed, retires to America. His ‘passion for Thyrza cooled’ and taking for granted Thyrza might have forgotten him, he marries an old friend - “a scholarly idle with a great many motives and jogs through life contented” (189).

The class-consciousness of Mrs Ormond has been seen as vicious attempt to separate lovers as she puts condition to them that they may not meet for two years. For Thyrza these years would be preparing herself, worthy of Egremont class and for Egremont a test of his love for Thyrza. Mrs Ormond succeeds in her experiment and for Thyrza it’s disastrous. Mrs Ormonde was aware of Egremont’s infatuation what Thyrza took for love.”(Thomas, 3)

Thyrza’s disillusionment with her notions may be seen in her refusal to marry Gilbert Grail, a working class man with ‘enterprises and intellect’. Aspiring above her class proved fatal for her. Herbert Rosengarten in his essay, ‘The Theme of Alienation in Thyrza” sees this strategic flaw in her decision as cause of her self - consciousness and alienation.(Rosengarten, 24)

Here it may be added that Thyrza’s alienation and death are neither of her making nor she has control over there. She is victim of
circumstances. Her desire to marry Walter Egremont is as much outcome of her desire for upward mobility as it is for her love for him. In a touching scene after her escape from her earlier dwelling to avoid marriage with Grail she divulges to Mrs. Ormonde: “I don’t do any wrong Mrs. Ormond. But I was going to be married.... I could not may him. I didn’t love him.” (97)

Thus in Thyrza’s case self-consciousness dawns in her confrontations with the social and scientific environment. Her ambition, her desires for better life may be seen to be fostered partly by her mother. We are told in the beginning of the story that her mother was a teacher and looked properly for her education till she was alive. Education as a means of social upliftment, cultural refinement and emancipation has been a potent factor behind the self-consciousness of many characters in Gissing’s novels. However, it may be noted here that education in arising self-consciousness sometimes also strengthens the notion of class-consciousness particularly when it fails to bridge the gap of prejudices between upper and lower classes. This is testified by Peak’s scholarly education and his failure to materialize his aspiration for Sidwell, a middle class culturally refined lady. As Buckland, Sidwell’s brother sees it with deep-seated prejudices:

“But I must remind you that Peak belongs by origin to the lower classes, which is as much to say that he lacks the sense of honour generally inherited by men of our world. A powerful intellect by no means implies a corresponding development in the moral sense.” (380)

John Sloan sees the “unbridgeable distance and permanent difference between the two classes” as the reason of failure of love affair between the aristocratic Egremont and working class girl Thyrza. For
Thyrza too the bridge is the symbolic barrier to the realisation of her desire for an existence beyond and above the life, which was her lot. It is at their final meeting that Egremont deserts her before they have reached the Westminster side of the river and ‘his own part of the town’ (324). Thyrza poses a challenge to the ‘naturalised barriers’ of class and privilege and she is destined to remain in Lambeth. The desertion itself comes to be seen as recognition of real class barriers. It is this, which lies behind Mrs. Ormonde’s ‘prudential forecast and Scheming’ to keep them apart and finally daunts Egremont’s belated to marry Thyrza in end: “He knew what miseries had again and again resulted from marriages such as this, and he feared for her quite-as much as for himself. For there was no more passion.” (444)

Thyrza’s choice of Egremont may satisfy her desire for social elevation, but it also necessitates her betrayal of Gilbert Grail at Lambeth. Here the intolerable dilemma of Emily Hood is (A Life’s Morning) torn between cultural aspiration and the loyalties of the home. Thyrza’s ideal is characterised with confused pathos as unearthly. Her Inner life, like Grail’s cultural aspiration and Egremont’s own idealism, is seen finally to bow to the overriding forces of circumstances. Indeed for Gissing himself, who confessed to weeping while he wrote the final chapters of the novel, Thyrza was one of the most beautiful dreams I ever had or shall have. Thyrza is not mute. she speaks of a desire for social elevation in the scientific environment of the Victorian Period.

In A Life’s Morning, Emily Hood’s marriage to a prosperous shop owner, Mr. Wilfred in not acceptable to his father because she is a governess. Wilfred’s father’s following statement explains the traditional situation of the society in the scientific environment of the Victorian period:
I mean Wilf, that I am not yet in the frame of mind to regard
the children’s governess as my daughter-in-law. Miss Hood
may be all you say, ‘It would not willingly be anything
scrupulously just. The fact remains that this is not the
alliance, which it became you to make. It is in a very
pronounced sense marrying beneath you. It is not easy for
me to reconcile myself to that.” (64)

Marriage below a social status, traditional domination of father in
the decisions of sons and daughters are some of the issues Gissing has
attacked. Another example of parental domination may be cited from The
New Grub Street, where Miriam sacrifices every bit of herself to her old
parents but they use vile languages against her. Mirian, with the fine
instincts of a daughter who has had to mediate between a disappointed
father and a dependent, hostile mother, tries heroically to reconcile these.
Gissing’s Born in Exile may be studied as a picture of the Victorian
middle class prejudices and snobbery through the experiences of its hero,
Godwin Peak. Faced with the reality of entrenched social stratification,
Peak transfers his energies from London and the contentions of urban life
to the leisured world of rank and privilege. ‘Put it in the correct term’ he
confesses to Earwaker, “I am a plebian and I aim at marrying a lady.” (69)
Driven by the social aspirations and financial insecurities of his class he
decides to fight the world with his brain. Peak tries to infiltrate the
sanctity of the upper middle class household by exploiting Warricome’s
belated hope of reconciling rationalism and religion. He pretends to be a
Christian to Woo Sidwell, a lady of Warricome family. Caught between
his own background and the upper-middle class society which he
attempts to infiltrate Peak stands declassed.
His duplicity and hypocrisy brings his tragic end. He fails to realize the basic fact - that the society of high birth, culture and refinement is not so brittle that he could infiltrate it so easily. John Sloan analysing Peak’s state of mind says:

His Olympian vision is conceived not simply in terms of wealth, it embodies an absolute sense of class. His desire to scale the social heights to which he feels he belongs ‘by right-of nature’ takes the form of an overmastering ambition to marry a woman of perfect breeding. (Sloan, 104)

Gissing through Peak’s dilemma, duplicity and vaulting ambition presents the class prejudices, and hypocrisy. He also brings forth the dogmatic adherence to religion in Warricombes. Jacob Korg says “religion was turned into religiosity: and ‘a despotic prudishness became parts of society’s ordinary moral standards.” (Korg, 134) Gissing makes visible the social and cultural imperatives of Peak’s seemingly absurd and irrational behaviour. He shows these in the specific context of English class form has pointed out “cares too much about the existential nakedness of the situation he portrays to worry too much about the possessive sensibilities of his . . . readers.” (Ideology and Fiction, 67)

Gissing’s criticism of middle class prejudices is a logical extension of the social ideas of his novels of poverty. The great curse of poverty in his working class novels is its corruption of human gifts. In his later novels of late eighties and nineties Gissing saw that the competitive spirit of modern civilization produced the same result in all classes, though it might operate in more indirect way in some classes. The middle class, after gradually coming to power in England during the Industrial revolution and winning political rights in the reform of 1832, quickly began to supersede the landed aristocracy as leaders in most phases of
English life. The ideals of a puritan class engaged in competitive business permeated all of English Society from the poorest factory workers to the royal family. It was in effect a new aristocracy, which set fashion and moral standard and based its ideas of social organization upon the exigencies production.

The overmastering ambition of the Victorian society was money making. Calvinist religion preached the doctrines of election and economic success as almost equally important to salvation. The obsession with business comes’ in the school room scenes of Dickens’ *Hard Times* where mass-education was often directed towards the mechanical skills that would produce efficient clerks and good businessmen. In Gissing’s *The Unclassed, The New Grub Street* the commercialization of art has been bitterly criticized as the growth of such a business like culture. “The novel, like Victorian society in general spoke the language of money for it would hardly have been intelligible if it had used any other tongue”, Comments Jacob Korg. (134)

Responsible contemporary observers reported that the Victorian middle class thought, felt, suffered, and rejoiced in terms of money. Money became an obsessive value in the Victorian society. Naturally, the race for it resulted in acute industrialism, competitiveness and growth of modern culture. Gissing criticized the values, which emerged out of such a society in terms of women question, marriage, vanities, prejudices and commercialization of art. In *A Life’s Morning* Wilfred’s father warns him against marrying Emily Hood, a girl below his class:

You ally yourself with some one from class beneath your own. Such marriages very, seldom prove anything but miserable, and always bring a great many troubles. You will say Miss Hood is raised by education above the class
which she was born, but no doubt she has relative, and they
cannot be entirely got rid of. (202)

Emily Hood (A Life’s Morning) embodies a conflict of passion that
‘Gissing owes a great deal to charlotte Bronte.’(Goode, 84) Emily’s
desire for elevation into the world to which she feels she belongs by
‘right of nature’, and conscience to a personal inviolability in the face of
social disadvantage. The conflict here is between the freedom of the
country house and the psychological and material oppressions of ‘home’. Emily manifests the ‘deliberate reticence’ and ‘extreme moderation’
characteristic of Charlotte Bronte’s heroines e.g. Jane Eyre. This is
explained as her ‘concession to the fate which had made her a governess’
and paradoxically as her means of exercising power over ‘those whose
bread she ate’ (49). It is the force of her individuality betraying itself
‘even under the disadvantage of complete self-suppression’ which at first
attracts Wilfred Athel. Yet if for Jane Eyre the obstacle to passion is a
fierce ethical demand ambiguously rooted in the need for social as’ well
as personal elevation for Emily Hood this demand is seen by contrast to
derive not from individualism or personal judgment, but from involuntary
social attachment. It is not so much that Emily sacrifices her happiness
‘in the name of an auster personal morality’, but rather that the sense of
betrayal that attends her social and intellectual elevation sets in motion a
psychological mechanism of guilt and sacrificial atonement.

Emily’s unwillingness to yield to the sensual pleasure of
Dagworthy the employer of her father who threatens her of dire
consequences throwing of his father from job shows her strong moral
conscience, individual independence. She cannot bargain her youth and
beauty to an old capitalist for her father’s job. Emily’s refusal to
Dagworthy’s offer for marriage is not without consequence. It would
result in lack of money, death of his aesthetic pursuit, which has been represented by ‘Palace of Art’ which she dreams of making with Dagworthy’s help. Emily Hood chooses individuality at the expense of economic security and materialistic gains. The sacrifice, which she makes for it, costs her desire for social elevation.

Finally, in her union with Athel, a capitalist who has been in love with her at the close of the novel symbolically spells materialization of her - all desires. However, unlike Thyrza, Emily Hood succeeds in her mission. Here the social trap sprawls as obstruction not as a destiny to be lived up. Among Gissing’s middle class women portraits Amy strikes one as one of the best specimens of woman. Wendy Lesser has rightly commented: “In Gissing, the material world cannot be ignored and the power of money is never underrated.”(Lesser, 218)

In The Nether World all characters are condemned to a miserable life in the slums. One notes a painful yearning for liberation from the slums throughout the novel. Sidney Kirkwood struggles in vain to persuade Hewett family to move to more comfortable lodgings but “it was like contending with some hostile force of nature.” (The Nether World, 153). Clara rejects self-control completely, “It was not her own doing, something impelled her, and the same force call it chance or destiny would direct issue once more.” (159) The society in The Nether World is diseased and inhabited by debased creatures.’ “What a vile, cursed world this is where you may see men and women perish before your eyes, and more chance of saving them, if they were going down in mid ocean.” (229)

Gissing as a social moralist realised that social environment plays a significant role in shaping morality and the character of people. The corruption of social and moral value represented by the crimes of Bob
Hewett (*The Nether World*), crude behaviour of Clem Peckover who uses filthy language and who is fit for no other society than those of slums are such examples. Clem Peckover has been described as “an embodiment of fierce life, independent of morality.” (18)

Bob Hewett (*The Nether World*) represents the crudities and evils of slum society. The violent nature of Bob Hewett, unnatural crude activities of Slimy, violent behaviour of Clem Peckover have been shaped by the misery, scarcity, wretched human conditions in the slum society. Gissing is a firm upholder of the idea of heredity and environment for shaping personality. He applies this analysis of environment to the study of social morality of working class and the middle class in many of his novels.

The sense of poverty as shameful and evils of slum life like crime, prostitution and diseased values pervade *The Unclassed*, *Workers in the Dawn*, and *The Nether World*. The desecration of values under the stress of ‘poverty’ which makes crime of every indulgence (103) has been shown in Ida Star’s fall from a shop-girl to a prostitute. The amoral behaviour of Casti’s wife, Harriet, and her friend Mrs. Sprowls is another form of degradation that reign the society in *The Unclassed*.

Ida’s fall as a prostitute may be seen as corruption of human nature by poverty and the environment. The desecration begins in Miss Rutherford’s school in Lisson grove, where Ida Starr has truck down with her slate to another girl who has provoked her by saying that her mother is a bad woman, and gets her living in the streets. (2) The scene between the mother and the daughter when Miss Rutherford’s letter comes, and on the mother asking her daughter why she has to leave, Ida tells about her violence and the cause of it, is truly pathetic.
The child’s look of love and proud confidence intensifies the unhappy mother’s anguish she is afraid of that if the child knew how her mother got her living she would cease to love and respect her. The bitterness with which this bread of poverty and shame is earned, and the survival of intense motherly affection and watchful care that she may have good education have been touchingly described. (16) Ida’s mother’s helplessness caused by the adverse circumstances and her genuine desire that ‘no breath of evil may sully’ her daughter’s young mind (17) has been presented touchingly. C.J. Francies has rightly observed: “The study of Ida’s mother’s feelings for her daughter and for her own life simultaneously introduction to the Harvester edition of this novel comment: “The Nether World was a valuable document in the cause of reform not surprising, for The Nether World is built around themes which preoccupy the social anxieties of 1880.” (vii)

The problem of housing has been presented by Gissing in many of his working class novels but it is more distinct in The Nether World. All characters of The Nether world are at once trapped and rootless. The desire for stability finds an artistic expression in Sidney Kirkwood’s search ‘to find new lodgings.’ Once homeless Sidney is so overpowered by desire for new lodging that he becomes skeptical; ‘Who can say when / shall he really settled again or whether / ever shall?’ (232) Sidney’s fear is the fear of all the people in the ‘nether world’. The instability in their lives suggests their rootlessness. With the exception of the aged (Mrs Peckover), the degenerate (Mrs Cardy) and the Byasses (Who are imprisoned in their respectability) everybody in the course of the novel moves. Jane moves from Clerkenwell close to Hanover Street (and to different rooms within Hanover Street). Sidney moves from Tyose Street to Crouch End and Pennyloaf and Bob, “had lived in six or seven
lodgings since their honeymoon in Shooter’s Garden” (248). The Hewetts moved from Clerkenwell close to a kitchen in kings cross Road to Farringdon Road, to Crouch End.

The second point is that the instability is confined. It is confined to ‘filthy hovels’, more squalid dwellings to slums. As P.J. Keating would put it: “Throughout the novel the idea of the slums as a human trap is relentlessly pursued, and the action of every character are circumscribed by it.” (Keating, 85) When Sidney Kirkwood takes a train into the country he looks down over “the pest stricken regions of East London across miles of a city of the dammed ... above streets swarming with a nameless population.” (109) He further struggles In vain to persuade the Hewett family to move to more comfortable lodgings but “it was like contending some hostile forces of nature.” (154) Clara rejects self-control completely: “It was not her own doing, something impelled her, and the same force - call it chance or destiny would direct the issue once more.” (230) Towards the end of the novel we see in the wake of slum clearance the Hewett family move to more filthy dwellings. Gissing stresses on the housing needs of the people.

Another point which needs to be made about the housing is that though distinctions are insisted on - so that for example, Shooter’s Gardens and Merlin Place are notably more squalid than Clerkenwell close or Burton Crescent the prospect of change in undermined by the fact that the respectable buildings are as depressing as the slums. The model dwellings in Farringdon Road for example, are as oppressive as the rookeries. The Crouch End seems to be more desolate than either with its ‘crumbling stucco’, and it’s feeling of remoteness. It may be seen In Sidney’s entry to new lodgings, which is ‘filthy’ and ‘where his
neighbors under the same roof were craftsman, carrying on their business at home.’ (232)

Working class housing had, of course, been a regular topic throughout the Victorian period, but the penetration of central and east London by the railways are the new thoroughfares (Clerkenwell Road being one of them) meant both intensification and overcrowding. There were many attempts to provide piece mill solutions to the problem Octavia Hill, the Charity organisation society, the Model Dwelling Companies etc. The solution seems to have been of two kinds. One was to try to replace the rookeries with tenement building. These were usually too expensive and, as Gissing show very depressing and prison-like: “filth, rottenness, evil odors possessed these dens of superfluous mankind.’ (179) The other, ‘ultimately successful’ solution was to admit the prior claims of industry commerce to the land of central London and dispatched the working classes to the suburbs.(Wahl, 36-49) He argues that the suburb became increasingly like new healthier slums. It did not solve the overcrowding problem, but simply gave a temporary respite to the pressure. Gissing portrays in detail the slum life, but he also looks outward from it. He sees the human dimensions of the slums - people, sufferings, suffocation, environment and a yearning for liberation.

The nature of employment and overgrowing unemployment is one of the running themes in the novels of George Gissing. Both 1886 and 1887 witnessed demonstrations of the unemployed and 1889 was to see first, major organized strike of non-skilled workmen - the Dock-strike. In The Nether World (1889) many trades are named (more than 16) most of which are connected with small-scale industry which services a consumer market (Artificial flower, jeweler, printers, roller maker, baker etc.). Both Jane and Sidney for example, make useless ornamental goods for the
wealthy middle class. Moreover, most of the work is unstable. Johns Hewett becomes successively a lath render, a cabinetmaker, a carpenter, and a packing case maker, and Bob’s craft (die sinking) is moribund.

The most notable feature of work in London in the late nineteenth century was the lack of large-scale industrial units. Stedman Jones argues that this tended to popularize the types of work available. They were either lightly skilled or totally unskilled. There was little work for the semi-skilled. The predominance of unskilled work, the small scale of production and the inevitable seasonal rhythms of a consumer market meant that a solid core of London’s population was condemned to casual labor. The casual labor was the insoluble problem of late nineteenth century industrialism in London. The inner industrial perimeter”, writes Stedman Jones’, “developed into an area of chronic male under-employment, female sweated labor, low paid irregular artisan work in declining trades: an area associated with small dealing petty criminality and social desolation.” (Jones, 154) This exactly describes the world of work in the novel. John Hewett (The Nether World) is a tragic figure. He is bewildered as his chances of regular employment as skilled artisan is eaten away. With his hair dyed black to make him look younger he walks the streets seeking work.

The Nether World (1889) offers a portrayal of society, which is very close to Morris’s analysis of the capitalist system. At the centre is alienation. Sidney Kirkwood is condemned to the production of trivialities for a market governed by “abstract” demand. Bob Hewitt is made redundant by the decline of his craft and he is led to forgoing money as an ironic comment on that which has declared him superfluous - the profit motive. Above all, work is dominated by its relentless, pleasure less inhumanity and in terms of real human need, its futility.
This is very close to Morris’s analysis in “Useful work versus useless Toil”. In “Misery and Way out” (1884), Morris said, “Friends, this earthly hell is not the ordinance of nature but the manufacture of man... and it is your business to destroy it.”(Morris, 162) Gissing’s novel might be a reply to this. In Marxist terms, Gissing’s vision is, reified he has made a metaphysical reality out of a historical one. Gissing’s novels dealing with socialist theme doesn’t offer the potential of change. The seeds of revolution are not presented within the realism. And this is the basic difference between Gissing and Morris. Gissing was not a socialist in the sense we talk of Morris. Gissing was until 1882 very sympathetic towards positivism and this led him by a natural process to be something more than tolerant towards socialism. This is obvious in his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and explicit in two articles on social democracy. In the first article he writes,

... it must not be forgotten that the theory of socialism rests on the purely scientific inquiries of cultured minds. Recent German writers, such as Marx, Duhring, Schaeffle, and Adolph Wagner are neither mere enthusiasts nor demagogues, their convictions the evils of our present economic system are the result of historical and practical knowledge which demand respect.(Gazette, 10)

Sidney Kirkwood in *The Nether World* explores his earliest memories of a childhood devoid of motherly care. He remembers, “An intelligent warm hearted man, of whose latter years was to realize such moderate competency as should place his son above the anxieties which degrade.” (52) The overall impression given by Sidney in the novel is that of a quite, altruistic, long-suffering workingman. At the early stage “young Sidney was giving signs of an unstable character, at fifteen he had
grown tired of drawing, wanted to be this that, and the other thing was self-willed, and showed no consideration for father’s difficulties.” (52) Sidney’s father dies after two years, and Gissing comments: “… The death was sudden, it affected the lad profoundly, and filled him with remorse which was to influence him whole life.” (52)

Most of the characters in Gissing’s working class novels are “class” conscious and they see no satisfactory escape from it: “We are working people, we are; mean the lower orders... and it has to be faced’ (The Nether World, 58). While his working class characters like Thyrza (Thyrza) and Clara Hewett (The Nether World) are self-cultivated characters who show a yearning for liberation from the existing conditions of poverty and struggle. Class-consciousness of the characters is stepping stone to self consciousness in Gissing. Self-consciousness in Gissing’s characters doesn’t dawn spontaneously but out of their experiences in the world. In a Gissing protagonist self – consciousness comes through circumstances, education and self-assertion. It also comes through circumstances, which enchain their freedom, desire for fulfillment of socio-cultural aspirations, economic as well as aesthetic needs. Gissing’s emphasis on civilizing effects of education is also a significant factor.

There is a difference in the degrees and stages of consciousness from the beginning to the end. This is further manifested in actual and possible consciousness. Actual consciousness as Luckas and Goldmann put it, “indeed many kinds of misunderstanding and illusion, elements of false consciousness and exaggerated notions of self”. Possible consciousness means the view of the world raised to the highest and most Coherent level. At its highest stage this level of consciousness means total change from the ‘existing reality to the reality.’
Gissing’s characters cast in the background of reality are limited to first type i.e. actual consciousness and its subsequent stages. The possible consciousness is relevant in the context of Gissing only in its earlier stages of change of reality from a sense of false consciousness to real consciousness or state.

The stages of self-consciousness in Gissing’s characters viz. Peak, Thyrza, Walter Egremont, Henry Ryecroft, Clara Hewett, Monica, Jasper Milvain may be traced to simple sense of awareness about one’s being often veiled by false notions or a sense of hatred towards’ one’s own class. The second stage marks a strong desire of the protagonist to uplift and enlighten himself or herself from his state to the upper state. This is marked by an obsessive desire for individual upliftment and reconciliation with the upper class. Social mobility would better explain this tendency.

The third stage is the stage of non-realization of being where a protagonist finds his social and cultural aspirations getting crumbled against the social and economic reality, as we would see in the case of Thyrza, Peak, Monica and Alma Rolf. This in its extreme form leads to the fourth stage i.e. the stage of alienation. Godwin peak (Born in Exile), Henry Ryecroft (The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft) are examples in the case.

To Gissing’s self-conscious protagonists society is the breeding ground for awareness. The social distinctions, prejudices coupled with economic disparity first remind an individual of her or his position. Passing through the purgatories of sufferings, failures he comes to the cold realization of the reality. Between these two extremes he discovers that his ideal is reverse of the social reality. In The Nether World, Clara Hewett’s consciousness of her class has been formed by the environment
in the slums. Unlike other characters she defies the Wretched conditions of life to which she had been condemned. What to her relatives is accepted social reality causes suffocation to her? In childhood she was taught at home because her father’s ‘principles naturally favoured education on an independent basis’ (80). Behind these principles lies “Prejudice then and still common among work people of decent habits made him hesitate about sending his girl to sit side by side with the children of the street. . .” (80) As she grows up nourished by her father’s constant reminder ‘we are the working classes, we are the lower orders’ she questions herself why she ‘be robbed of chances’ because of poor birth. She prepares herself mentally for a teacher’s career but her father’s financial problems again block her career and future prospects. The awareness of Clara has been shaped by her own feelings and Inner conflicts. This passage provides an insight into her self-analysis as well as conflicts:

Clara was seventeen now, and understood the folly of which she had been guilty a few years ago, but at the same time she felt in her inmost heart the tyranny of the world which takes revenge for en-ors that are inevitable which misleads a helpless child and then condemns it for being found astray ... she knew her defects, knew her vices and a feud with fate caused her to accept them defiantly. (82)

Sidney Kirkwood and Jane Snowdon, although superior in both morality and intellect to the other characters are bound by their notions of own class. For Sidney Kirkwood to have an inkling of a better world outside can at best lead to only frustration: “How can we any of us help what we are driven to in a world like this” (102). To John Hewett Clara’s father’s passive acceptance of the fate is code of his morality. Gissing
says through passivity of John Hewett, Pennyloaf Candy that ‘passivity in the nether world is self defeating.’ On the contrary, Clara shows some degrees of consciousness to rise above her class. Right from the beginning one sees, she is rebellious against the life in the slums. She is ambitious, and becomes restless as she sees her dreams thwarted by the crude realities: “Many a time had she sobbed out to herself, ‘I wish I could neither read nor write! I wish I had never been told that there is anything better than to work with one’s hands and earn daily bread” (82) and “The better she understood how difficult was every way of advancement, the more fiercely resolute was she to conquer satisfaction which seemed beyond the sphere of her destiny” (82).

Clara wanted to be a theatre actress and the bitterness of being a ‘work-girl’ inhibited her notions. She asks herself, “Why should it be impossible for me to go on to the stage.” (82). Passing through shop windows where photographs of actresses were exposed, She asked, “I am as good looking as she is. Why my portrait shouldn’t be seen someday in windows.” (82) Sidney Kirkwood gives a better analysis of her character when she talks of snowdown: “She doesn’t know, poor girl! Everything in the life she has been living’ is hateful to her - everything since she left school. She can’t rest in the position to which she was born; she aims at an impossible change of circumstances.” (102)

Clara like Thyrza is too fragile, idealistic to bear the burden of crude realities. Both show hatred towards their surroundings, both are ambitious; both strive for better position in life. They have keen desire to rise above their class. Clara maddened with her dream of being an actress fails to resist her temptation when Scawthrone an old acquaintance of her school days entices her to the stage. The result is disastrous. She returns deceived by scawthrone. After her escape from the family she comes in
contact with forces, which she had neither experience nor the will to combat. John Hewett fails to save his daughter because social frustration forces her to adopt the only philosophy open to her: “We have to fight, to fight for everything, and the weak get beaten. That’s what life has taught me” (211-12). Clara’s vaulting ambition, her escape from the family, her performing of a few odd supporting roles in London theatre and finally bed-ridden in a hospital are the stages of her suffering. Clara’s return (240) is marked by acceptance of the reality. She no longer shows her rebellious nature she is calm, yielding and fully conscious of herself. She is no longer overwhelmed by the illusion that given opportunity she would have made a great actress. Gissing says, “Feeling herself thus utterly changed, she could not speak in her former natural voice, her utterance was oppressed, unmusical, monotonous.” (245)

One of the most remarkable aspects of this novel is the manner in which Gissing presents working class woman of such diverse types as Penny Loaf Candy and Clem Peckover. The two women are completely opposite products of the slums both rivals for the affections of Bob Hewett. They are destined to be defeated by forces they are incapable of comprehending. It is the defenseless and passive Pennyloaf who actually wins Bob “She was a meager, hollow-eyed, bloodless girl of seventeen, yet her features had a certain charm, that dolorous kind of prettiness which is often enough seen in the London needle-slave” (80).

Pennyloaf Candy has been first introduced on the way to Pawnbroker (the most potent reminder of the impermanence of property in working class life). She marries Bob only after she has been savagely mauled by Clem Peckover. Even though—with a brutal father and a drunken mother, She is accustomed to violence. Clem Peckover terrifies her. Spurned by Bob’s parents because he had ‘married beneath him’,
they spend their wedding day at the crystal Palace, described in the often quoted chapter ‘10 Saturnalia’.

Although she knows it may end in violence Pennyloaf accepts the treat. For her it has a specific significance, an opportunity to shine which she must not forgo: “How proud she was of her ring! How she turned it round and round when nobody was looking! Gold, Pennyloaf, real gold! The pawnbroker would lend her seven and six pence on it, any time.”

When they return to their single room, Pennyloaf with her wedding clothes torn, Bob drunk and bloody from a fight of Clem Peckover’s arranging they hear from outside their window the sounds of a drunken woman: “That’s mother”, sobbed Pennyloaf. “I knew she wouldn’t get over today. She never did get over a bank holiday.”

The pattern of her life is immediately established. What follows is inevitable the quiet acceptance of a dying child, the beating from her husband, and the struggle to find sufficient money for food when be return to the more exciting life of the streets. While Bob sleeps drunkenly beside her, Pennyloaf lies awake: “She was thinking all the time that on the morrow it would be necessary to pawn her wedding ring.”

The portrait of Clem Peckover is the most striking. She cannot be a victim of her husband’s tyranny like Pennyloaf PJ. Keating says: “No where in earlier English fiction had such portrait of a working class woman appeared. She has no qualities which could take her to any other society save that of the slums, nor does she desire any”. Her particular branch of power portrayed frequently in novels of upper class life, has her anew force:

One would have compared her, not to some piece of exuberant normal vegetation but rather to a rank, evilly fostered growth. The putrid soil of that nether world yields
other forms besides the obviously be lighted and Sapless.

(85)

She is described as ‘an embodiment of fierce life, independent of morality’, and at sixteen her ‘Charms’ were ‘of coarsely significant order.’ (86) As we have already seen” Gissing had earlier avoided presenting working class girls as sexually attractive by endowing them upper-class qualities of beauty, grace and sophistication. Other working class girls have not been considered in sexual terms at all. Now however, he faces the fact that “the soil of (the) nether world yields other forms besides the obviously delighted and sapless Clem Peckover is this world’s equivalent of the demimondaine.”

In the chapter that introduces her, Gissing imbues her every action with a slothful sensuality. The detailed description of the ‘greasy plate’ of food she gloatingly devours, together with her manner of spending a day off work ‘lolling in front of a blazing fire’, and taking her exercise in the form of a fearful assault on the young Jane Snowden, conveys faithfully a vivid picture of all consuming animality. She is always associated with men. Women are seen by her as enemies or potential enemies. Even the relationship with her mother is one of actual selfishness. Her sadistic love of violence combined with her crude sensuality gives her a control over the men of the district, which she ruthlessly employs. She sets Jack Barlcy on to Bob Hewett during the Crystal Palace ‘bacchanal’ because he has dared to marry Pennyloaf. Urged by her mother she traps Joseph Snowdon into marrying her, and later when this marriage does not bring the expected financial gain, she returns to Bob Hewett urging him to help to murder her husband and to ‘starve Pennyloaf and her brats half to death’ (88). Women she can deal with in her own manner: “Pennyloaf flew with erected nails at Clem Peckover. It was just what the later
desired, in an instant she had rent half Pennyloaf garments off her back, and was tearing her face till the blood streamed.” (89)

Clem Peckover resembles to some extent Dickens Mrs. Bumble in *The Oliver Twist*. Has she been conceived in wider way than in the melodramatic form she would have made a memorable character of working class women? As John Goode comments in the introductory chapter of *The Nether World* “Clem Peckover is very strikingly done but she is not finally used in fact she is totally upstaged as the novel proceeds.” (xiii) The portrayal of Clara Hewett (*The Nether World*) is one of the best examples of Gissing’s working class women. Gissing presents her not only as mute victims of circumstances but also as a rebel defeated by the vicious social and economic forces beyond her control.

Clara Hewett strikes as a self-cultivated ambitious woman who like Thyrza, wants to rise above her class. Right from the beginning she shows a different bent of mind and questions her existing condition as she grows up in slums: “Can I face life as it is for woman who grows old in earning bare daily bread among those terrible streets? Year after year to go in and out from some wretched garret that I call home with my face hidden, my heart stabbed with misery till it if; cold and bloodless”.(280) Clara’s identification with the people of upper class becomes so intense that it leads to a state of Mania ‘In spirit, virtue I belong to them.” (394) Her ambition to become an actress, her hatred against the wretched lives in the slums leads her to revolt against the life of the slums. She escapes to London where after a few odd works in theatre she has been attacked with acid by her rival who is jealous of her. For Gissing it is not Clara who is at fault but the social system, which moulds her and sets the trap with which she will destroy herself. Bondage in the nether world is not simply external but psychological too.
This is demonstrated most clearly in Clara’s return to Kirkwood after her disfigurement in the vitriol attack, which ends her dream of becoming an actress. Here we see that her subsequent survival with self-sacrifice. Her final choice of self-humiliation in the face of humiliating refusals of the social order in directed significantly by the same pathological impulse that characterized her original resistance to her father’s domination? The novel perceptively pinpoints the social and psychological currents of defiance and self-ruin:

The access of self-pity was followed, as always, by a persistent sense of intolerable wrong, and that again by a fierce desire to plunge herself to ruin, as though by such an act she could satiate her instincts of defiance. (94)

Her desire to regain Kirkwood’s love is motivated by a self-pitying, rebellion against ‘the martyrdom’ she has suffered. She chooses to humiliate herself in order to “command homage” and ‘make for herself a dominion.” (289) Gissing’s portrayal of women was guidance by his own image of women in his real life. As Pierre Coustillas, sees it “A closer inspection of his novels Gissing desperately clings to an idealistic view in his artistic rendition of his female characters.”(Coustillas, 297) This may further be corroborated with his own image of woman. He wrote to Gabriella Fleury, one of his friends and to whom he was emotionally inclined:

Let me Sketch the woman whom for so many years, I have vainly imagined, I.: saw her to begin with, a much nobler being than myself, I saw her before all, a true woman endowed with every grace of mind and heart which is characteristically feminine. Her face represents my own
ideal of personal beauty... she had very gentle eyes, eloquent sympathy, bright with intelligence, her voice was soft and varied, always musical. Then she was capable of passion... her mind was open to the world of art. (Gabriella Fleury, 31)

This image of ideal woman finds expression in the portraits of Helen Norman (Workers in the Dawn), Emavine (Demos), Sidwell (Born in Exile) and Emily Hood (A Life’s Morning). In Sidwell (Born in Exile) one sees a woman who is educated, delicate and culturally refined but she is not free to work at her own instinct. She is bound by the chains of conventionalities. This is shown in her dilemma of discarding the convention of the family leave her adherence to Christianity and Peak Whom she loves. She chooses to betray her love. Though she is aware of the fact that Peak’s’ offence is not as grave as it has been made by Buckland and his family. Sidwell presents socially a conventional woman as she confesses only ‘to know me hence forward, a woman who did not dare to act upon her best impulse.’ (491)

Thus we can say that 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 endeavour 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 Puritanic
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)

This evident distrust for science is copiously traceable in George
Gissing's novels: in *Demos* (1886), Kingcote, “the refined, sensitive and
pessimistic” (17) prototype of the novelist himself, “tortured with
jealousy 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.

Gissing’s *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed* tell the story of
determinism along the scientific lines of Darwin, Strauss and
Schopenhauer: *Demos*, a story of English Socialism and *Isabel Clarendon*
are a scintillating debate between atheism and agnosticism on the
scientific lines of Freud and Darwin: his *Thyrza* and *A life's Morning*
present the fullest predicament of the working class with the Ruskinian
teachings; his *Nether World* which is a gloomy Panorama of misery,
squalor and savagery of the lower classes of Clerkenwell, is a prototype
of Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserables*. 
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