CHAPTER – IV

THE MIDDLE NOVELS

Between the Coronation (1834) and the Diamond Jubilee (1894) Victorian life had passed from an agricultural to an industrial economy, from an aristocratic to middle class-proletariat society. History has seldom recorded a greater transformation in so short a period of time. Many indeed, most of the changes were still in progress at the turn of the century but their force and significance had already become distinguishing elements of the late Victorian temper. The rapid industrialization and urbanization led to the growth of a materialistic culture. It also sharpened the cleavages of class in the society. The thirst for money was so great that Engels who had come to England to work as an executive in Manchester surprisingly noticed the ‘brutal in-difference’ of the ‘Londoners’ who ‘sacrificed the best qualities of their human nature’ (Engles, 276) for making money. The euphoria for money and gradual alienation of the people, which Engels noticed in 1842-44, continued to be intensified in the coming decades.

Gissing in his novels examines the consequences of the commercial system and their deleterious effects on the individuals and the impact of scientific thoughts on lives of characters. He shows in a materialistic culture the finest virtues in human nature are crushed by the circumstances. The economic problems, necessity of money to satisfy one’s aesthetic sense has posed a challenge to the culture itself. The new economic system intensified social stratification with a small class of wealthy owners of capital who ‘consume in great deal while they produce nothing.’ So they had to be kept at the expense of those who did the work. As to the middle class, the bulk of them worked but did not
produce goods. Next came the working class, employed in making “all those articles of folly and luxury, the demand for which is the outcome of the existence of the rich non producing classes, things which people leading a manly and uncorrupted life would not ask for or dream of.”(Ingle, 40)

Gissing in his working class novels particularly *Workers in the Dawn* and *Demos* has shown the conflicts between the classes of the society. Gissing sees these conflicts inevitable and his characters seem to be trapped for which there is no escape. The economic conditions of the working class, unequal distribution of wealth, rise of a capitalist class at the cost of the working classes and the evils generated by scientific forces form the crux of Gissing’s *Demos, The Nether World* and *The Unclassed*. Like his early novels, the impact of scientific thoughts is clearly visible in his middle novels also.

Upto *The Nether World* (1889) Gissing’s criticism of scientific thoughts has been directed at its exploitation of the poor. Hence forward, he began to examine the values and achievements by which that society justified its shortcomings. His study of the working class society is symptomatic of a diseased society. It suggested that the condition of the poor was only one system of the malady. He related this malady to the tendency of money making that paralyzed the spirit of the English people, transforming all potential ideals and aspirations into the values of trade. He now laid aside the theme of poverty turning in *The Emancipated* (1890) to the larger subject of the spiritual condition of modern industrial society. Gissing in presentation of the middle class society, its corruption of values, examines and attacks many Victorian institutions viz. religion, family, marriage and prevailing notions about scientific thoughts.
In *The Emancipated* Gissing’s bitter criticism has been directed against the spiritual hollowness of the age. Ideas, change in thoughts of the people brought by industrialization and scientific revolution became major themes of his other novels namely *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Crown of Life*. The central characters Cecily, Doran and Miriam Haske, Gissing ironically refers to as ‘emancipated beings’ are really the victims of their own pretensions and whims. Jacob Korg comments: “... the urbane, perceptive iron suggested in the title, and a mood of sympathy for such innocent victims of social law as Cecily and Madeline Denyer often prevails.” (Korg, 140)

The chief characters of the story fall into two groups. On the one hand are: “the emancipated people” who have actively taken up arms against convention and who Cherish pretensions but futile ideas about art, culture and science. The leader of this group is Cecily Doran, the orphaned daughter of an old friend of Mallard and his ward. Mallard, the hero of this novel is a moody and lonely painter who says: “The one object I have in life is to paint a bit of the world just as I see it. I exhaust myself in vain toil; I shall never succeed but I am right to preserve I am right to please myself.” (25-26)

Cecily’s education has been entrusted to Mrs. Lessingham, a guardian who has brought her up in a spirit of freedom and enlightenment still shockingly new in a society that felt girls must be ignorant, if they were pure. This is how Mallard ironically describes the results of Cecily’s education:

Miss Doran is a young woman of her time; she ranks with the emancipated... Miss Doran has no prejudices, and in vulgar sense of the word, no principles. She is familiar with the Latin Classics and with the Parisian feuilletons, she
knows all about the newest religion, can tell you Sarcey’s opinion of the newest play. Miss Doran will discuss with you the merits of Sarah. Bern Hardt in ‘La Dameaux Camellias’ or literary theories of the Brothers Goncourt. I am not sure she knows much about Shakespeare, but her appreciation of Baudlaire is exquisite. I don’t think she is naturally very cruel but she can plead convincingly the cause of vivisection. (25-26)

Cecily uses her enlightenment as a Shibboleth and a fashionable ornament without having any real conviction about it or understanding of it. Her friends, the “empty headed” Denyer girls regard themselves as devotees of culture, when Madeline Denyer’s fiance’, who is a painter seems unable to earn a living, Madeline advises him to work for money until he is able to afford the luxury of painting as he pleases.

Contrasted with these amateurs of art is a group of Dissenters, whose religion has made them hostile to arts, freedom of conscience, and breadth of experience that they see about them. Mirian Haske, the widowed sister of Rueben Elgar, a young woman of strict Evangelical education, is the central figure of this group:

To the time of her marriage, her outlook upon the world was incredibly restricted. She had never read a book that would not pass her mother’s censorship; she had never seen a work of art; she had never heard any but ‘sacred’ music, she had never pursued a journal; she had never been to an entertainment unless the name could be given to a magic lantern exhibition of views in Palestine, or the like. (94-95)

Her friends, the Bradshaws, are older and more amusing examples of middle class parochialism. Stubbornly insular, they do not try to
understand the strange custom of the country (Italy - a place of their visit), but regard it as a kind of madhouse. This type of hypocritical attitudes viz the nude statue of museum, which irritate them, is frowned by Gissing as hypocrisy of the middle class.

Cecily’s rebellion and elopement with Reuban Elgar to England against wishes of her family is symbolic of her protest against the Victorian convention, i.e., domination of parents in marriage. After two years of marriage she gradually learns that she is subject to domination of her husband whose loyalty to his wife has been displaced to another woman. He drifts into infidelity and debauchery. Cecily enters into a marital bond where ‘each joy in the world’ is seen to represent ‘a counter balance of sorrow.” (169) What Gissing satirizes is the hypocritical dilemma of Cecily who pretends to be an emancipated woman yet lets herself swept by conventional values.

Cecily cannot divorce her husband and according to the general view, it is her duty to remain with him in spite of everything. Her resignation as a conventional wife to the husband’s tyranny and the contradictory values of a period of changing social customs has involved her in an ‘insoluble dilemma.’ She cannot, however, love a husband whose infidelity she knows. She has already decided that it is right for woman to leave her husband under such conditions but only after her own marriage approaches the breaking point does she see how heavy the responsibilities of marriage are? Gissing comments:

Life is so simple to people of the old civilization. The rules are laid down so broadly and plainly, and the conscience they have created answers so readily when appealed to for these poor instructed persons, what a complex structure has morality become hard enough for men but for women
desperate indeed. Each must be her own casuit, and without any criterion sake what she can establish by her own experience. (243-44)

This dilemma of choosing what mind rejects and embracing what the rules of the society (rather values) dictate is inherent in the society itself. It is this dilemma, which confronts Sidwell in *Born in Exile*, “To act as I wish would be to outrage every rule and prejudice of the society to which I belong.” (490)

Socially Sidwell presents herself as a conventional woman. Though she loves Peak and she is aware of Peak’s state of mind after his confession (361-62). “I suffer from the thought that I was not born into your world, and that you must be always remembering this difference.” (362) She succumbs to the dictates of her parents. She lacks courage in following what she thinks to be right. She accepts herself “as the woman who did not dare to act upon her best impulses.” (491)

Jasper Milvain, in *The New Grub Street*, as the title of the opening chapter suggests, is “a man of his day”: he is emphatically on the side of the new”, and his alignment determines his success just as Reardon’s commitment to the past underlies his abject failure. He is pre-eminently the practical man, selfish, ambitious, adroit, and shrewd in his estimate of competition, as Jerome H. Buckley says, “Charming when amiability seems politic, caddish when betrayal appears profitable.”(Buckley, 26) He has no delusions of genius or even a great talent as a writer. His objectives are simple and cynical. “Never in my life”, he tells Reardon at the outset, “shall I do anything of solid literary value; I shall always despise the people I write for. But my path will be that of success. I have always said it, and now I am sure of it.” (66) Later he warns Mirian Yule with the same bluntness: “I shall do many a base thing in life just to get
money and reputation. I cannot afford to live as I should like to.” (186) Milvain succeeds as we see him in the beginning: He is reclining on a sofa, his hands behind his head, as his sister plays the piano, at the end he lies back “in dreamy ease” while his wife, Amy widow of defeated Mr. Reardon plays and sings for him.

Like Milvain Mr. Rueben Elgar, the brother of Mrs Baske in *The Emancipated* is conscious of his well-being. They are not morally acceptable. Rueben Elgar, a selfish, idle, and deceitful who has given to the natural sophistry of self-indulgence is manipulative like Milvain. His egoism, sensuality and exploitation of woman to win their admiration is in no way a positive success. Morally he stands accused as Gissing sees him “Idling away his manhood” ‘inveighling an orphan heiress’ (168), then treating his wife with cool neglect is not product of advanced thoughts. What Gissing strives to convey is that the corruption of value and moral degeneration creates an Elger or a Milvain to counter society’s vices with their vices, which is ultimately effect of the science?

Amy Reardon in *The New Grub Street* presents Gissing’s representation of the life of the Grub Street hacks, a sense of related dualism - leisure and work, the self and the world, male and female identity - which are seen usually to direct total life of the individual in an age of science. In portrayal of Amy’s character Gissing also touches one of the sensitive issues of his age. Gissing by depicting the disaster in the family life brought by the exogamous marriage sat irises science. Under this single umbrella may be gathered his three most obsessive concerns: money, sex and class-consciousness. Undoubtedly coupled with these factors are stringent desire from the family and the gap between expectation and its fulfillment.
Amy Reardon is wife of a writer Mr. Reardon who at no cost would compromise with the trades in literature. Mr. Reardon’s failure to consult the dictates of the market prior to writing like Jasper Milvain brings a series of catastrophic events in his life viz. suffering, poverty, death of a child, conflicts with wife, separation and finally Reardon’s death. Amy Reardon represents material culture and she wants that her husband should earn money writing what may be sold like hot cakes in the market. She has been encouraged by Milvain’s success that had made money by writing ‘hack works.’ Amy’s sense of materialistic values has been shown in her desire of better home, sofa and other luxurious amenities, which are the essential commodities of the scientific age. She is neglectful of her cities as a wife to Reardon and seems to have used home as a means to mint money for luxury. This stretched to a point beyond tension gives way to separation. In the break up of Reardon’s marriage Gissing renders with painful accuracy and acute insight the irreconcilable conflicts and estrangements of those inadequately conventional expectations by which men and women judge each other. Reardon’s separation from Amy is on one level, a refusal to act to the traditional male role: “I will have no woman slave dragging out a weary life with me. (336) At the same time, his retreat from family life also involves an irrational longing to re-establish a consolatory division between the self and the world, between free relationship and compulsory labor. It is this, which deprives Reardon’s appeal to essential self-hood of any persuasive force, “Don’t you think of me apart from all that I may do or not do? If I had to earn my living as a clerk, who is paid so much a week.” (242) His demand is for Amy’s unconditional love and unqualified devotion to who he is, and not what he does. Amy is certainly not so generous not to betray Reardon’s moral and intellectual adequacy:
“I am certainly not the wife of a Clerk who is paid so much a week.” (238)

The destruction of Reardon is finally brought about not so much by his character which is totally unfilled for the new style literary life but by his marriage to Amy who is a mouth-piece of Milvain’s theories. She is a traitor in much the same way as Whelpdale and the various stages of her moral corruption are organized so as to emphasize this point. Reardon bitterly reminds her that during the early days of their marriage “she was proud of him because my work was not altogether common, and because I had never written a line that was meant to attract the vulgar.” (236) Her intellectual snobbery is merely a form of social distinction as she soon drops entirely her concern with literature as such and develops a new interest:

She talked of questions such as an international copy right, was anxious to get an insight into the practical conduct of journals and magazines, liked to know who ‘read’ for the publishing, houses. To an impartial observer it might have appeared that her intellect was growing more active and mature. (139)

When Amy Reardon learns that her particular brand of intellectual snobbery can only be sustained by living perpetually on the edge of financial disaster, her whole attitude begins to change. Milvain, whom she had earlier treated with condescension - the natural feeling for the wife of an artist looking at a tradesman - now becomes to her arche -type of literary man. His ideas she takes wholesale adding to it her particular brand of venom: “If I had to choose between a glorious reputation with poverty and contemptible popularity with wealth, I should choose the latter.” (246) It is the very choice, which Reardon is incapable of making.
It is socially acceptable, she argues, for a literary man to have been poor; indeed it is expected of him. But to acknowledge that one can no longer make a full time living from literature is to confess to ‘intellectual decline.’ This point is further stressed in chapter XXVI when Amy, now separated from Reardon, says to Mrs. Carter. “My life is being wasted. I ought to have a place in the society of clever people. I was never meant to live quietly in the background.” (389) Like Milvain she calls herself an intellectual because she recognizes the practical way through life in the scientific age of Victorian period. Amy’s marriage with Milvain is symbolic triumph of commercialism in literature, materialistic values over artistic pursuits and morality. P.J. Keating rightly comments:

Amy’s eventual marriage to Milvain is inevitable. From scorning him as journey man friend of her superior husband, she has progressed sufficiently to become his pupil, helped to destroy her husband, and on the way has become an ‘intellectual’ herself –she is the natural partner. It is ironic theme of every success story in The New Grub Street that intellectual pretension always accompanies moral corruptions, and that to fall into poverty is to suffer both moral and intellectual degradation.(Keating, 35)

Mirian (The New Grub Street) is delicate, frail and idealistic in love and her duty towards her father. Her parishes like Reardon. Milvain deceives her because he discovers that her father who runs a printing press leaves her pauper. Milvain’s love for Mirian is brittle because it is pitched on material gains. Mirian’s struggle between love and duty is unlike Amy Reardon. Her choice as a woman is not between the absolute freedom of marriage and the bondage of her parental home, but between two sets of limiting relationship. Indeed her toil in the literary market
places as her father’s ‘work house’ gives her a tragic dignity and independence denied to the wholly domestic Amy. It is a conflict, which Gissing explores, in his subsequent novel - notably in *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirl Pool*.

In *The New Grub Street*, love can claim no absolute moral sanction. Rather, Marian 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 the responsibilities of personal fulfillment and filial loyalty until the loss of her legacy deprives her of any margin of release. Mirian like Mr. Reardon fails while Jasper Milvain and Amy are successful because they cater to the “needs of the time.” On the contrary Mirian and Reardon are morally advanced but ‘misfits’ in the “corrupt and morally vacuous social order.”(Sloan, 100) The novel, through the ‘typical woman of the new time, the woman who has developed concurrently with the journalistic enterprise’ (386) is made with fitting irony to register the inadequacy of two men who in turn possess her.

Education in Godwin Peak’s case (*Born in Exile*) as it exposes him to the scientific temperament, rational judgment, and it also makes him ambitious. In the case of Peak and Ryecroft education is instrumental in shaping their characters. It whereas awakens awareness also makes them alien to their own class. This is manifested in their attitudinal and behavioral aspects viz criticism of the people, cursing their birth and heredity. Moreover, it is strongly, manifested in strong passion for social mobility. This awareness leads them to collide against the existing social reality. Clara Hewett’s conflicts with her own world (*The Nether World*), Peak’s rejection of dogmas are examples of such collision.

Self-awareness in Peak comes through education. It is developed gradually as he sets on his search of identity in middle - class society.
Peak was born in the lower strata of the English bourgeoisie class. Educated in a provincial college among, socially superiors he inherited some of the characteristics of them and these made him conscious of social and cultural deprivations he had suffered earlier.

His ambition coupled with academic excellence clears his entry in the Warricomb family a middle-class cultured family. Peak’s hatred against his heredity and his ideals are manifestations of his self-awareness. He is occupied by the thought that his heredity and social environment interferes with his expectations. Peak recedes to past later on evaluating him: “Tome, my origin is simply a grave misfortune, to be accepted and if possible, overcome.” (362) It also interferes with his interpretations and understanding of the world. His own imagination encourages him to romanticize love, art and religion and this leads to his disillusionment.

This disillusionment is reflected in his tendency to curse his own background, heredity and environment as Gissing says: “He trod in footsteps of his father and with inherited attitude.” (260) He also has a strong desire to conquer the world to which, Warricombs belong. Waricomes are rich, educated and cultured. Their social and cultural refinements attract Peak. Sidwell, the daughter of Mr. Warricome attracts him for all her sweetness, education and cultural refinements, which Peak found lacking among his own relatives. Warricombes are dogmatic and die-hard Christians. Peak through his education, scientific leanings is agnostic who defies dogmas, Christianity. Warricombes too enjoy the discussion on these issues with Peak. To Win Sidwell he pretends to be a Christian while in the heart of his hearts ‘he is a born agnostic’ (112) caught between his deep-seated desires to have a wife of cultural refinement and his own convictions not to accept dogmatic ideas.
blindly. The situation, which follows, explains many complexities of his character and finally leads him to self-analysis.

Peak Pretends to be a Christian and his essays on agnosticism prove to Warricombes that he is a Christian. But when Buckland, Sidwell’s brother comes across some of his writings on atheism he takes the act of Peak as a breach of morality and tries to expose him as a fraud. Peak with a sense of guilt escapes to Germany where alienated and with deep sense of guilt he dies in exile. Peak’s evasions are directed, as Andrian Poole has suggested, by fear of exposure that would destroy the illusion of perfect inner Chastity. But that very illusion is itself rooted in the need to maintain a sense of autonomy and worth in the face of a rigidly stratified society. Moreover, the tact displayed by Earwaker and the Warricombes indicates that Peak’s class anxieties are not simply idiosyncratic: “That deep-rooted sense of class which had so much influence on his speculative and practical life asserted itself with rigid consistency even against his own aspirations ...” (246)

Peak’s disillusionment breaks when he sees the realization of the society is different from the ideals he cherished in books, polemic discussion on Marx, Darwin, and Mill. He undergoes evaluating his own value in exile. Peak in his confession to Sidwell says:

If I thought of nothing but friendship it would seem rational enough that you should accept me for what I am a man of education, talking your own language. Because I have dared to hope something more, I suffer from the thought that I was not born into your world, and that you must be remembering this difference. (361-62)

Peak’s hatred against his fellow being, his agnosticism, his yearning for a class to which he thinks to be naturally belonging, by the
right of intellect and his act, his duplicity have been seen as his snobbery by artist like Jacob Korg and Halperin. However Michell Ballard in his reassessment of *Born in Exile* has demonstrated that the purpose of Peak’s disguise is not Machiavellian but simple psychological experience to behave in a hypocritical manner. He further argues, “It is only after some sub-conscious impulse has promoted him to violate his own conscience in spiritual matter that he plans to settle in Exelier and study with a view to entering holy orders.” (Ballard, 123-24)

Peak’s conscious act of pretensions, his moral conflicts, his deep sense of guilt suggest that his motive is not to deceive Warricombes but it is the deep-seated desire in his mind and heart for a wife like Sidwell of ‘refined culture’ that guides him to the act of pretension. After the meal with Warricombes in course of which he voices opinions that are poles apart from his deep convictions. He goes through a stage of burning shame and intense self-questioning:

What had happened to him seemed incredible though he revived a mad dream, a ludicrous coherence. Since his display of rhetoric at luncheon hall was downright somnambulism. What fatal power had subdued him? What extraordinary influence had guided his tongue, constrained his features? His conscious self had no part in all this comedy, now for the first time he was taking count of the character he was playing. (*Born in Exile*, 178)

Peak’s act of pretension as a Christian to win Sidwell is morally an act of deceit. He is aware of the fact that it is difficult to get into the society, which fosters such ideas as dogmas and strong class distinctions. Peak chooses to be at his own. Peak like Mrs. Baske (*The Emancipated*), a woman who has imbibed the modern ideas sets herself apart in spirit
and action. Like Peak she also sees historical scriptures, inscription or Revelation skeptically.

In her ideas, scepticism, she comes close to Peak. Gissing led this doubt to polemical discussion when Peak is confronted with moral and spiritual dilemma. He compels the readers to think why one should be mechanical accepting dogmas, conventions, what one thinks conventional to one’s mind and heart. To this Mill observes: The despotism of custom is everywhere the standing hindrance to human advancement” (266) and he earlier notes in the same book: “He who does anything because it is custom, makes no choice.” (212).

Peak stood for originality of ideas free will and this was one of the reasons of his alienation. Mill observes in ‘Liberty’ (189) “Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model and set to do exactly work prescribed for it but a tree which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides according to the tendency of inward forces which make it a living thing.” (149)

Peak discovers in Warricomes; orthodoxy, narrowness veiled under their sophisticated culture. This awareness of Peak further culminates in his alienation from the class to which Warricomes belong. Peak views his escape from London as ‘To live be to pursue the object of my being.’ (439) Peak’s alienation is embodied in his being, as Gissing comments at the end of the novel “He was born in Exile, so he died in exile.” (486) In the childhood he is alienated from his relatives temperamentally. To Warricomes society in London to which he was exposed as a student he is intellectually alienated. Finally, in Germany he gets alienated from his own culture, country, physically and geographically. This struggle for existence shows the impact of theory of evolution of Darwin.
Like peak the alienation of Clara Hewett, Thyrza and Reardon (The New Grub Street) from the society is due to their inability to grasp the social complexities fully. They struggled against adverse circumstance; social conditions even their fates. But they failed to get out of it. Peak’s these words to Sidwell provide an insight into his self-consciousness and self-pity: “Life utterly denied to me the satisfaction of my strongest instincts...” (440) and as he earlier says to Sidwell: “I was condemned to a life of miserable incompleteness. I was born in Exile.” (363)

Peak’s search for identity in a world to which he belongs by right of intellect (362) ends in his search for himself i.e., awareness of himself as well as the social reality. His ideal of the world was different from the real world. Peak’s alienation is like Turgnev’s Bazarov (Father and Sons) and Camu’s Meursalt (The outsider). They are educated, atheists and challenge the dogmatic ideas surrounding them. They show a rebel in thoughts. They are born in exile. He lives in exile, die in exile. They remain alone in front of the world, which fails to understand them and judges according to criteria, which are other than their own scales.

The failure of Peak, Ryecroft, Reardon, Mutimer suggests the failure of society which has created a class of people like them and denies their due place. As Mr. Wyvern, one of the radical characters in Demos puts it: “Created by the mania of education, consisting of those unhappy men and women whom unspeakable cruelty endows with intellectual needs while refusing them sustenance they are sought to crave”. (101)

Ryecroft’s alienation, his life of solitude from a life of struggle in London to Devonshire, countryside after sudden inheritance of wealth may be seen as his alienation. His alienation is from the world of London where he struggles as a writer. Full of concern for the poor, underdogs he is filled with bitter feelings: ‘London is a great place for corruption of life
and values’ (89). His alienation from the former world is strong and complete. He is no more burdened by class division, problems of the poor. Unlike Gissing ‘I suffer more and more from solitude’ (Eduard Bertz, 38) Ryecroft enjoys his solitude. He enjoys his hobbies reading classics and gardening. He says: “I don’t enjoy anything nowadays which I cannot enjoy alone.’ (12)

Ryecroft sees the materialistic culture as self-contained and narrow. He painfully observes, “The greatest abyss in this world is not lack of love but lack of coin.” (89) His alienation solitude also provides him a time of self analysis: “My life has been always tentative - a series of false starts and hopeless beginning” (169), Ryecroft’s consciousness from class to self may be seen as sudden acquisition of wealth and intense sufferings due to poverty. One of the strongest desires which Ryecroft’s character shows is desire for money and when it comes he seizes the opportunity to serve and nourish his own unfulfilled desires. The actual sufferings of Ryecroft, Peak and emergence of their individualism were the general crisis of the Western Intelligence in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Besides these characters there are characters like Jasper Milvain, “Miriam Haske (The Emancipated), Totty (Thyrza), Rhoda Nunn and her group (The Odd Women) who show consciousness as part of a culture they have inherited from the society.

Similarly in The Odd Woman, Monica scared of the fate of her spinster sister marries the man of her choice and soon she discovers that she has sold her independence to a ‘tyrant husband’. Monica-Widdowson relationship does not only reveal the ‘oppression of woman hood’ but the distortion of social and moral values. The erosion in the values has affected both in their respective spheres. To Monica marriage is ‘a refuse, a Chivalric rescue.’ She seeks a refuse in her marriage with Widdowson
from the ‘monotonous spinsterdom’ of her sisters. To her marriage is more a security, a means for realization of her ‘self-protected gestures of independence.’ ‘She is too in sincere to understand Widdowson’s ‘neurotic obsession’ about women. The result is horrendous. She slides into the miseries of an unsuitable marriage. On the contrary to Widdowson marriage is a ‘sacred heaven’ in a hostile and wicked world. His image of a wife is one whose ‘sphere is home’. In other words he is too idealistic to be generous to Monica’s, sense of independence. A clerk all his days ‘like so many thousands of men’, Widdowson suffers the ‘frantic misery’ a man unable to live upto society’s idea of masculinity.

The clash between Monica’s ego (sense of independence) in pursing her activities outside the sphere of home and Widdowson’s ego (male domination of females) show the clash between the conventional value and the changing values. The conventional values demanded from the wife to be obedient to the dictates of the husband and usually a wife conceded to it. Therefore there was no question of clash. The changing situations by the end of the century inculcated among the women new moral values i.e. self-respect and exercise of freedom. Widdowson represents the rigidities of the old social values. Monica rebels but she gradually submits to the forces of the society. John Sloan comments: “Monica’s rebellion submits to the (compulsions of rootless) cultureless society.”(Sloan, 124) Finally, Monica’s death in the childbirth as John Sloan says in ‘unsatisfactory way of resolving the problems raised in the novel.’ (124)

Gissing uses death of Monica in the novel to comment on the social conditions and to carry forward the dream of Rhoda: ‘the day will not be far when feminist would grow like greenbay trees”. The orphaned female child symbolizes the insecure feminist movement, which is to be
groomed by the hands of Rhoda and Miss Barfoot, Rhoda’s “vision grew, a sign made her lips quiver and once she murmured “poor little child.” (336)

Gissing also comments on the social conditions. He says the society is not ripe for accepting a creature like Monica because the changes in the attitudes of man like Widdowson is yet to be seen. Therefore she ought to perish. Moreover, Monica’s death in the context of the novel is natural. First, divorce in the Victorian age was rather difficult and a separated woman had harder lot. Secondly, an untrained woman like Monica, cannot survive outside the security of marriage. Gissing raises the above issues in Monica’s death in the childbirth. Gissing attacks the class prejudices brought by class-consciousness and their subsequent effects.

In *The Odd Women* Gissing presents a set of characters represented by Miss Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn who show consciousness at many levels of their thoughts, actions and social role. They are awakened to the challenges of the time. Their shifting from class to self-consciousness has been aroused by factors such as exploitation of women by men, their illiteracy to equip in the market of jobs, and above all growing consciousness of women like Rhoda by education. Miss Barfoot’s speech to the assembled crowd shows how she is aware of future prospects for women:

They point to half a dozen occupations, which are deemed strictly suitable for women why don’t we confine ourselves to this ground. Why don’t we encourage girls to become governess, hospital nurses and so on. (135)

The consciousness of these women is due to their exposure to changing environments, and growing consciousness towards science.
Monica, the sister of Rhoda Nunn who marries Widdowson to escape the curse of spinsterdom of her sisters finds later on that she has sold her liberty to a tyrannical husband. She is conscious enough to reject his authority but she fails to reconcile with the changed situation she dies a slow and painful death by overdose of sedatives. Thyrza, Monica, Peak and many other characters show that their self-realization, consciousness of the reality end in death. This suggests that they couldn’t face the changed circumstances.

The self-conscious heroes and heroines of Gissing in their journey from class to self pass through excoriating experiences of poverty, social barriers, social and religious prejudices and their own metaphysical and scientific doubts. In spite of their strident cry of self-deification they seek something different, a living life that embraces the whole of man’s nature. There are points of contact, for example between Peak’s justification for transgression, Reardon’s willful Clining to self-ruin and Thyrza’s self- destruction. These contact points are in the reality of purity, honesty of their characters themselves. So far as moral integrity of their characters are concerned. One has to see Gissing’s characters from within they fail because as naïve individuals they cling to an ideal of spacious culture that appears ineffectual against the forces of change.

Gissing like Dostoevsky dives deeper into the inner realm of his characters and sees them, their follies, oddities, virtues desire for self-improvement and thought growing as one sees a child growing into adulthood learning through a process of trial and error. Pierre Coustillas comments:

He was in fact a highly sensitive artist, as little inclined to posing as ever a writer was a bastion of tormented sincerity, a man whose natural delicacy enabled him to reconcile
confession with dignity although one of England’s most soul
stirring writers at the turn of the century. (Coustillas, 437)

The self-consciousness in Gissing as observed is not peripheral in
meaning. It has deeper meanings, which constitute man’s struggle,
Mutimer, Monica or Rhoda; all of them are trying to seek meanings of
life.

With *In the Year of Jubilee, The Whirl Pool* and *The Emancipated*
Gissing returned to more modern problems confronting women the
climax of which has been achieved in *The Odd Women*. As John Sloan
would see it: “The focus here is on the excitements and extravagances of
those more leisured, suburban groups created by new markets and profits
of Empire.” (Sloan, 128)

In this new world of expanding consciousness and freedom, the
tragic focus is no longer the hero, torn between human values and a
refusing society. It becomes the heroine who even in the midst of her
suburban freedom is compelled to submit to the traditional sanctions of
sexual and social oppression. *In the Year of Jubilee* has been recognised
from the first ‘as a significant exploration of new attitudes to marriage
and woman’s role in the society.’ (Coustillas)

The story centers on the heroine Nancy Lord’s choice between the
plebian advertising agent, Luckforth Crewe and the socially superior
Lionel Tarrant who eventually seduces her. Nancy is forced into
concealing her marriage and subsequent pregnancy by the death of her
father, since she cannot benefit by his will if she marries before the age of
twenty-six. Abandoned by her husband, Nancy is seen to develop from
girlish wantonness to patient heroism, first as a single parent, and finally
as a reconciled wife, accepting the terms of Tarrant’s bachelor marriage.
Tarrant’s desertment throws Nancy lonely and he seems to have convinced her in pleading for concealment and morality of ‘separate lives’. With his desertion there begins Nancy’s heroic search for a moral alternative to ‘Coarse vitality’ ‘shame’ culture. Her desire for ‘some honest, strenuous occupation’ involves a rejection of both ‘mere social excitement and the idle vanity which formerly she styled pursuit of culture.’ (219)

Her subsequent discouragement as she walks the street of London displays the common problem of employment of women “In the battle of life every girl who could work a sewing machine or make a match box was of more account than she... A little hook on ‘employments for women’, which She saw advertised and bought, merely heightened her discouragement.... She was a Coward, she dreaded the world; she saw as never yet the blessedness of having money and secure home.” (297)

Nancy may shrink ‘hack into her suburban home’, but she recognizes that such a withdrawal is cowardly and inadequate. She strengthens herself to assert herself of independent womanhood. On the face of it, the novel would seem to confirm the popular image of the ‘New Woman.’

Sometimes the ‘New Woman’ was shown as a neurotic prey to hysteria and morbid self-analysis, with a constitution allegedly enfeebled by over education and too much strain on the intellect... Alternatively, the advanced woman was likely to be credited with a hale and hearty constitution, with a bluff good humor likely to manifest itself in back slapping or the tendency to refer to intimate.... as jolly good chaps. (Dyehouse, 189)
Carol Dyehouse’s account of the literary stereotypes of the ‘New Woman’ refers to us the popular basis of Gissing’s characterization of Jessica Morgan and Beatrice French. Beatrice’s masculine affections, her fondness for colloquialisms and her virile appetite for ‘rump steak smothered in onions’ and ‘sound Stilton cheese’ clearly present a satirical view of the advanced woman. (300)

Gissing’s portrait of Beatrice is suggestive of deeper psychological currents. Her ‘independent sort of life’ is seen to avoid the destructive tendencies displayed by her sisters Fanny and Ada - the former lapsing into promiscuity, the latter into Shrewish violence. Indeed, it is because Beatrice Nancy is able to win for herself a margin of self-sufficiency in fulfilling her desire ‘to do something’.

Nancy’s attitude of sarcasm, Cold reticence and unwavering practicality, capacity to fly to just those logical ineptitudes which most surely exasperate the male intelligence would seem to expose Tarrant’s male egotism and conventionality. To his plea that she should free herself from dishonor and the burden of solitary struggle Nancy’s response is that she can “see no freedom... I am as free as I wish to be. I have made a life for myself that satisfies me and now you come and undo everything. I won’t be tormented I have endured enough.” (303) Nancy’s claim for independence can be read merely as an implicit taunt to Tarrant’s male prejudices and her own self -assertion of independent womanhood.

It is this perceived margin of freedom in the novel that would seem to allow the possibility of a measure of happiness and repose in the face of the heroine. Nancy Lord’s development from youthful romanticism and willfulness to the maturities of her difficult and unconventional marriage becomes, as Gillian Tindall has suggested, ‘the classic theme of an individual finding himself or herself though tribulation’ (Introduction
to *In the Year of Jubilee*, 1976, xvi). Nancy is not of course, exempted from the novel’s critique of the vulgarism and wanton spirit of the times. It is after all the effect of her ‘sham’ culture and education, which are held up for ironic inspection.

Robert Selig has commented in this context on Gissing’s opposition to those educators of the girls who were ‘allies of the scientists’. It is seen as an indication of their spiritual and intellectual deficiency that, “Nancy Lord studies evolution, Fanny French inorganic chemistry and Jessica Morgan reviews “Geographical Progression.”(Morgan, 703-20)

Nancy too fails to perceive the spiritual tract necessary for living successfully. In the description of the jubilee celebrations there is a note of contempt at the spectacle of Nancy’s submission to the hilarity and ‘stupid contentment’ of the crowd: “Nancy forgot her identity, lost sight of herself as an individual.... She didn’t think, and her emotions differed little from those of any shop girl let loose. The culture, to which she laid claim, evanesced in this atmosphere of explanations.” (68-69)

Nancy’s fall was due to her own weakness to pose as a new woman, to surrender to Tarrant’s lust and then defying it in her own way. In case of Ida Starr (*The Unclassed*), Carrie Mitchell (*Workers in the Dawn*) likes Hetty Sorrel, for example in George Eliot’s Adam Bede is seen to be caused not only by sexual instinct but by circumstances which have made her the victim of male sexuality. But Nancy’s fall is due to her own stupidities and representing her as a woman of advanced society. Francoise Basch has pointed out, in the mid Victorian novel, “Female frivolity, the puerile aspiration to become a lady is still seen as the principal causes of the fall.”(Basch, 176) Gissing in portrayal of Nancy questions the received notions of class, culture and sexual hierarchy,
establishing an image of the heroine’s engaging independence of obstructive social, sexual and scientific conventions. However, at the close of novel Nancy’s marriage to her seducer indicates Gissing’s adherence to those traditional values that are brought into question.

In *The Odd Women* (1893) Gissing portrays predominantly a set of women who remain spinsters. Margaret Walters in introduction to The Odd women writes. “Ridiculed by men, treated with scornful anxiety by other women, the old maid is a traditional figure of fun. Man without woman may achieve certain romantic panache; women without men are oddities, hardly women at all.” (Introduction *The Odd Women*, London, 1980, i)

*The Odd Women* is about a number of such failure: Mary Barfoot, ‘a handsome’ forty-year old woman, Rhoda Nunn, her strong-minded thirty-year old assistant, the Madden Sisters’ Alice, Virginia and Monica. Among other women portraits are notably Miss Eade (a shop girl turned prostitute), Miss Rayson (who poisons herself after being deserted by her married lover), and Miss Wheatly (who marries Mick Lethwaite after a seventeen year engagement) and last but not the least, Miss Haven who plans to start the first woman’s newspaper.

Rhoda is a strong, self-reliant and unromantic woman who shares Miss Barfoot’s idea of emancipation of women by training them professionally to be self-dependent. Rhoda is unlike her sister Monica. Monica enters into marriage with Widowson to escape the curse of spinsterdom and eventually discovers that she has sold her independence to a tyrant husband who thunders: “Women’s sphere is home . . . I sincerely believe that an educated woman better had become a domestic servant than try to imitate life of a man.” (152-53)
The conversation between Rhoda Nunn and Monica provides an insight into Rhoda’s strong will. “Do you know that there are half - a - million more woman than man in this happy, country of ours”? “Half a-million.” She further continues: “I look upon them as great reserve when one woman vanishes in matrimony” the reserve offers a substitute for world’s work. True, they are not all trained. I want to help in that to train the reserve.” “But married woman are not idle’, protested Monica ‘Not all of them some cook and rock cradle.” (186)

Rhoda’s unromantic nature, rejection of the institution of marriage, and strong advocacy for encouraging professionalism, among women are crusts of her outermost. Having previously rejected Mary’s belief that woman ought to preserve a nurturing, material quality Rhoda finds her outer mantle melted into motherly love. She finds herself moved to passion holding her sister Monica’s orphan daughter:

She gazed intently at those diminutive features, which were quite placid and relaxing in soft drowsiness. The dark bright eyes were Monica’s. And as the baby sank into sleep, Rhoda’s vision grew dim, a sign made her lip quiver, and once more she murmured, ‘poor little child. (198)

Rhoda holding Monica’s Orphan Child in her lap invokes the image of Virgin Mary in her love and sacrifice. Towards the end of the novel two spinster sisters are looking at Monica’s daughter whose future seems to be uncertain. Rhoda Nunn says, “Make a brave woman of her,” and believes that “the world is moving and that feminists are flourishing like the green bay tree.”(197) Earlier she envisages optimistically: “When all women, high and low alike are trained to self - respect, then man will regard them in a different light and marriage may be honorable to both.” (91)
Rhoda’s optimism has a vision, which Gissing far sighted (foresaw) and … seems to be both socially and morally desirable. Carlyle, Mill and contemporary reformists had advocated it earlier. Here the value system has shifted from conventional to modern values. Rhoda’s futuristic, it is possible in “far off days the world will change and equality between man and wife will be the norm.” (131)

Gissing through Rhoda Nunn, Marry Barfoot sees the feminist movements of 1880s and 1890s and conveys the moral that women are not condemned to be only devoted wives of tyrant husbands, pathetic mothers but there are also other meaningful roles for them in the society. *The Odd Women* (1893) is a tribute to self-conscious feminism represented by Marry Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn. And it touches many more issues -social, economic conditions, problem of marriage, and women questions. John Sloan rightly comments: “What Gissing does in *The Odd Women* is to find a specific historical focus for that thematic interest in contemporary feminist debate.”(Sloan, 117)

*In the Year of Jubilee* may be read as Gissing’s satire against the corruption of values in industrial society where materialistic culture is so predominant that all values of the society regarding marriage, family, women seem to have converged at one point i.e. money. Gissing’s criticism of Victorian manners and morality is basically governed by his ideals of a society and his dissatisfaction with the existing social system. Through his characters he raises many social and moral questions of his time with direct force, which he thought, Dickens avoided as unpleasant. To Gissing Dickens failed to combine truth-fullness of his work in many instances due to his conscious refusal usually on moral grounds, to give a faithful impression to his own experiences. To Gissing the novelist’s supreme morality was the principle of truth to his own knowledge of life.
“After all”, he once wrote to Algernon “One must write what is one to write.”(Letters, 81)

Gissing like George Eliot brought to fiction new responsibilities. These may be characterized as departure from the motives of entertainment and propaganda to the illumination of genuinely controversial moral issues, and an expansion of social and psychological areas. Both these developments arrived a new pinnacle in Gissing’s novels of social questions and morality. Gissing saw the social and moral values and problems of the society in relation to the spirit of the age. He refrained from reformatory zeal of his earlier novels Workers in the Dawn, Demos to bitter satire of the middle class social values and ways, which he underlined as conventional and unproductive. His pessimism emerges out of conflicts between his expectations and the existing low ebb of culture, abject poverty and social evils leading to degeneration of humanity in a wider system.

For a couple of years at any rate, Gissing seems to be deeply committed. In April 1881, he tells his brother that he is preparing a lecture on the practical aspects of socialism. And a year later, in April 1883, he writes to his sister describing Bank Holiday: “It’s utterly absurd, the idea of setting aside single day for great public holidays.”(Letters, 16) The propaganda of socialists led him to detest their methods of working.

Obviously enough, Gissing was neither a socialist nor he was interested in furthering the cause of socialism. It is his realistic picture of the society, his criticism of the social and economic condition, which prepares the ground for socialist ideas. Stephen Ingle rightly comments. “... Gissing did much to foster a general atmosphere favorable to the growth of socialist ideas.”(Ingle) Moving from the depiction of the lower classes, their economic conditions, and problems to criticism of society as
a whole Gissing became more firm in his convictions about Socialism. He wrote in his common-place book: “The whole answer to socialism is: that if a society were ready for a pure socialism, it wouldn’t be such as it is now.” (Korg, 81)

Gissing sees the material inequalities rooted in the system as failure of the economic system and political system. He resented whatever failed to offer practical solutions to the problems. Beatrice Webb emphasized the way in which a growing awareness of the extent of social and material inequality in the 1880s inflamed the conscience of many of her generation. She spoke of a new ‘collective consciousness of sin’ among the upper’ and middle classes:

A growing uneasiness, amounting to connection that the industrial organization, which yielded rent, interests and profit on a stupendous scale, had failed to provide a decent livelihood and tolerable conditions for a majority of the inhabitations of Great Britain. (My apprentice, 186-87)

The socio-economic conditions are a powerful force in the development of characters in the novels of Gissing. He also sees how interplay of the twain play upon the instincts of simple men and women and bring social and moral degradation due to the effect of the science.

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

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

This impact of the scientific thoughts is clearly visible in his novels. In New Grub Streets, Gissing curses science and its world, in which even authors are forced to struggle in an environment of garrets and basements, often too poor to afford a fire, and slaving daily at the British Museum for an uncertain pittance. In Born in Exile, Gissing presents the inner history of a man whose integrity, rather than his happiness, has been affected by science. In the Year of Jubilee, Eve's Ransom, and The Whirlpool, both present Gissing’s scientific approach to study the effects of the socialistic programme on different characters and their capacities: Rolfe's uncertainty, in The Whirlpool, for example, show the gist of all these works, namely, the revolt against “the softness and sweetness of civilization,” (13) and he is, ultimately, forced to recognize “the brute savagery of it,” (19) “the very lingo,”(19) “the tongue of white chapel
blaring lust of life in the track of English guns;” (19) and prognosticates further that the complex social life will prove a curse to the posterity.

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

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