CHAPTER VI

The Theme of the Family in Victorian Women Writers:
Charlotte Mary Younge, Elizabeth Gaskell and Dinah Mulock Craik

The nineteenth century considered the golden age of the novel, witnessed the rising popularity of the women novelist. These novelists were committed to a particular literary mode—"the depiction of the home and the family" (Forster 2) with emphasis on features like the supremacy of wifely and motherly functions, status of women in a patriarchal environment and inter-relation between members of a family. The theme of the family was a deep concern for the Bronte's who wrote from a "bleaker experience of life" (Michigan 71). There were other writers who were interested in the same issues that concerned the Bronte sisters. In this chapter, I have chosen three writers, who share a common interest with the Bronte's. The family as a theme forms an intrinsic feature in their novels. Charlotte Mary Younge (1823-1901) an archetypal Victorian conservative, takes an orthodox stand in her fiction and is interested in the family, rather than other relationships, apparently due to lack of love in personal life. The second writer Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810-1865) is different from her contemporaries, because she was unaffected by the emotional crisis which affected the other writers. Family in Gaskell represents the dualities or tensions of womanhood. The last writer is Dinah Mulock Craik (1826-1887), who led a more unconventional life than her female contemporaries. Family in her novels illustrates beautifully the dichotomies of Victorian female roles. All three have written a number of novels, but I have illustrated from only those novels, where family plays a dominant role. These writers were not much focused upon earlier, but changing critical fashions have
influenced our perceptions of what is to be read and studied. These writers were totally eclipsed when new criticism and textual study dominated the scene. The recent interest in popular culture in literature as social history, and in exploring the context in which major novelists produced their work, has led to a survival of interest in these writers. Re-evaluations inspired by feminism have also revived an interest in novelists who may have been ignored by critics in the past, because they were women who wrote about matters that concerned women. An analysis of the theme of the family in their novels will I hope provide fresh insights about these writers, as well as add to my arguments of the family and its role in the Victorian novel.

Charlotte Mary Younge was a best-selling author of the Victorian Age, whose appeal lies in the liveliness of her portrayal of the family. Her books picture large Victorian families, every member distinctly drawn and presented with insight and humour. Born in 1823, to a family of pious traditions, Charlotte was influenced deeply by the Oxford movement. Her books deal with contemporary life, and give a far more living picture of England in which the Movement was born, than it is possible to get from reading history. Like Jane Austen, Charlotte watched the great revival of religious feeling and of social conscience, which were the fruits of the Oxford movement. Unlike the Bronte sisters Charlotte, although a solitary child, spent her childhood in the company of the families of romping cousins, who were affectionately disposed towards each other. From an early age, she learned the joys of companionship and also learned to people the many hours of loneliness with children of her imagination. Charlotte describes her life beautifully through these lines:

My great world was indoors with my dolls, who were my children and my sisters; out of the doors with an imaginary family of ten boys eleven girls, who lived in an arbour. There were about sixteen dolls, large wooden, small wax, and tiny
dutch who used to be set in chairs along the nursery, and do the lessons when I had done mine. I was happy at home, but it was with a calm, solitary happiness; there no one but myself was a native of the land of childhood. The dear home people gave me all they could, but they could not be children themselves and oh, the bliss of that cousin land to me! (Younge, Project Canterbury 2 of 8)

We find here a yearning for a complete ‘home’ and ‘family’, and this she tries to fulfill by portraying large families in all her novels. Loneliness, which formed an intrinsic part in the lives of the Bronte’s, also seems to have affected Charlotte deeply. There were three things that drew Charlotte to write. One was love of history, which seemed to run like a second strand in her life. Another was the little village-folk who had made a place in her heart and lastly her own intense need of companions and love of fellowship. The people in her books were alive to her and she would write about them in her letters, in such a way that it is sometimes impossible to tell whether they actually existed or were fictional constraints. In spite of her fame and friendship with many brilliant people, Charlotte was dogged through life by shyness; always afraid she would hurt some one’s feelings. This was probably due to unusually strict upbringing. Her parents, who were both teachers, seem to have tried to quell her high spirits and to bottle up her glorious joy in living. Charlotte wistfully recalls how her mother had treated her critically from fear of spoiling her; “She was afraid of my being vain. Once on venturing to ask if I was pretty, I was answered that all young animals, young pigs and all, were pretty”(Youge, Charlotte Mary Younge 19). She carried through life a social timidity, which is reflected in most of her heroines.
Charlotte's first book *The Heir of Redclyffe* published in 1853 embodied the Oxford Movement and took the country by storm. Its admirers included Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Moris as well as the Anglo-Catholic divine John Keeble, who was the chief spiritual influence in her life. *The Heir of Redclyffe* is a lively novel, which gives us a vivid picture of the nineteenth century domestic life, and a clear understanding of Victorian sentiment. The novel begins in a manner similar to Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Like Heathcliff, Guy Morville the hero of Younge's novel is a waif. He is introduced to the Edmondstone family by the patriarch Mr. Edmondstone, but unlike Heathcliff who was rejected outright by the Earnshaw family, the members of Hollywell House welcome Guy. Guy's position as an outsider is much better than Heathcliff. Mrs. Edmondstone is moved by affection for the lonely boy who had "lost every family tie" (THOR 23). She extends her full co-operation and agrees to be his foster mother when occasion demanded. The Edmondstone family proposes to hold a "family party" (THOR 28) in his honour. Mrs. Edmondstone was "used to her husband's fondness for inviting guests every evening" (THOR 33). Younge here portrays the ideal Victorian wife, who never complains but accommodates her husband in all situations. Mrs. Edmondstone and her daughters accept the intrusion of Guy into their family. It is only his rigidly principled cousin Phillip, who refuses to accept him and tries his best to tarnish his reputation. The tense relationship between these two brothers forms the structural basis of Younge's *The Heir of Redclyffe*. The portrayal of a comfortable and confining family life is one of the major attractions of the novel. The scenes among the Edmondstone family have a relaxed charm, typified by the description of Mrs. Edmondstone's dressing room with its warm fire, comfortable mixture of furniture and air of snugness:
One of the pleasantest rooms at Hollywell was Mrs. Edmondstone's dressing room - large and bay windowed, over the drawing room.... It had an air of great snugness, with its large folding-screen, covered with prints and caricatures of ancient date, its bookshelves, its tables its peculiar easy armchairs, the great invalid sofa and the grate which always lighted up better than any other in the house. (THOR 33)

Hollywell House thus highlights a sense of domestic routine that conforms to the Victorian ideology of home as refuge. The homely and familiar atmosphere reflects Younge’s intense desire for the home she craved for.

It is here that we are introduced to the son of the Edmondstone family, Charles who is a cripple. He occupies the highest place among the siblings, and finds in his mother an indefatigable nurse who gives up everything for her son’s sake. His sister Laura and Annabel are literally his slaves, attentive to his demands, and his father always concerned to fulfill his whimsical needs. Through Charles, Younge portrays the undisputed sovereignty of the son of a Victorian family. Even in her personal life, Younge was always over shadowed by her less talented brothers. In Southey’s reply to Charlotte Bronte’s letter, he remarked that “literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life and it ought not to be” (Southey 81). Male opposition to women writers reflected middle—class Victorian male opposition to woman wage earners and a good deal of class snobbery and superstitious fear. Inside each individual family the father, brothers and husbands felt threatened by the prospects of female competition within the home. When Charlotte Younge, presented The Heir of Redclyffe to her family, her father severely informed her that a lady published for three reasons - love of praise, love of money and the wish to be good. It was an emotional impossibility for Charlotte to rebel against her father who was “the hero both to my mother and me; his
approbation was throughout my life my bliss, his anger my misery” (Younge, Charlotte Mary Younge 16). Her father was ready to control his anger if she wrote didactic books and dedicated the profits to the church. This way she was in a subordinate role within the family, dependent on her father and brothers. Younge was shrewd enough to judge the balance of literary and personal reputation women writers risked, if they tried to depict realistic men. The modern hero as Showalter remarks is “less a product of adulation then of ignorance – a projection probably of women’s fantasies about how they would feel if they were men, more didactically how men should act and feel – Heroes are their projected egos”(Showalter 136). Heroes in women’s novels are seen instructed by mothers, wives and sisters. There is a circumstantial need to introduce the hero into the woman’s world. The hero in The Heir of Redclyffe is an adopted child of the Edmondstone family. This is a recurring pattern in women’s fiction. Probably the women writer needed the narrative interaction of the hero and the family, to allow some movement and suspense in these family adoptations. A significant feature is that unlike heroes of male writers, these “feminine heroes”(Showalter 133), do not avenge themselves or their male factors by engaging in duels or by contesting elections. Rather they win indirect victories with tactics of guilt, another sign that they find their source in the female situation. Guy Morville the hero of Younge’s novel is a master of guilt. When a vigorous course of humility, self-control and check – turning leaves Guy’s enemy still disposed to hit, Guy nurses Phillip through an infectious fever, catches it and dies, Phillip on the other hand recovers, but is blighted with a guilty conscious because he misunderstood Guy’s actions. Guy reaches his denouement when he drags his pregnant wife to the village where the fever is raging and insists on nursing Phillip, himself although he is rich enough to engage any number of professionals. The power-motive in this willful – sacrifice is clear and accounts for Guy’s permanent appeal. “It
is the motive of a child who daydreams about running away making everybody sorry"(Showalter 138). Such sacrifice is the source of emotional power, which is a fusion of success and manipulation of guilt – two aspects of a woman writer’s position. Rochester’s blindness, Robert Moore’s illness and Phillip’s guilty conscious are symbolic immersions of the hero in feminine experience. Men must learn how it feels to be helpless and dependent. Only then can they understand how it feels to be a woman. These strategies were in keeping with conservative nature of the novel. G.M. Young points out “the evangelical faith in duty and renunciation was a woman’s ethic and the feminine novelists were reared in an atmosphere which made them instinctively Custodians of standard”(Young 34). Charlotte always harboured an intense desire to be a clergyman, and she channeled her immense energy into the portrayal of imaginary clerics in her fiction through whom she could preach.

Charlotte Younge was interested in the ‘Woman Question’ and in the education of women. Like Elizabeth Sewell, Anne Morbely and the Bronte sisters, she was concerned with the development of the ‘self’ through clashes of personal and social conditions within the family. Younge however was no feminist and pronounces in Womankind (1887): “I have no hesitation in declaring my full belief in the inferiority of woman, nor that she brought it upon herself”(1). She accepts the superior position of men and expects the women to rely on the powers of men. Younge is scornful of those strong-minded females who make themselves absurd by copying masculine behaviour. Her vision of a successful wife embodied:

Efficiency sympathy, cheerfulness, unselfishness, and sweet temper: these are chiefly what go to make the real helpmeet wife

... lady -- a loaf giver -- is sure to make homes that radiate light and warmth from their glowing central hearth. (Younge, Womankind 188-89)
This traditional picture can be seen in her heroines who are readily satisfied with the way society deals with them. They are resigned to the fact, that personal satisfaction must be sacrificed when domestic duty calls. Laura the eldest daughter of the Edmonstone family has to sacrifice her feelings, because Phillip doesn’t fulfill the criteria of a Victorian husband:

Oh, wealth, wealth! — what cruel difference it makes! All smooth here! Young, not to be trusted, with strange reserves, discreditable connections — that family — that fearful temper, showing itself even to her? ... Proved, noble, superior, owned as such by all, as Phillip is yet, for that want of hateful money, he would be spurned ... the love that has grown up with our lives must be crushed down and hidden ... (THOR 172)

The novel never forgives Phillip and Laura for reaching a secret understanding before he has the means to marry, and even after the wedding Laura is still under a cloud: “Poor thing! she had too much failed in a daughter’s part to go forth from her home with a clear loving hopeful heart” (THOR VI). Anabel, the younger daughter on the other hand, leaves Guy without responding to his declaration of love. She is ready to sacrifice her feelings because “mamma did not approve, so it must be ... there should be the end of it, never mind the rest!” (THOR 158). Neither sister is allowed to establish a successful independence from the parental home. Younge’s sympathetic concern for the demands of home and parents is an indication of her acceptance of the conventional roles played by women in the Victorian period. Younge is not an advocate of women’s rights, thus it is only right and proper that Guy and Amy’s child, as a daughter will not inherit Redclyffe. The property passes on instead to Phillip. There are however instances of Younge’s conservatism being surrounded by unorthodoxy. Her personal life illustrates the paradoxes in the lives of so many Victorian women, always
dependent on male guidance (her father and John Keeble). She was a dutiful daughter
devoting herself totally to her widowed mother. She remained single and took her
mother with her on all visits outside home. Younge's independent spirit comes out
when she challenges some reactionary opinion of women. While acknowledging that a
women should devote herself to her family she also points to an important truth that
"Pleasing a husband and making him comfortable and attending to her children is only
part of her office ... What she is, the opinion she utters, the influence she exerts have a
power for which she is accountable"(Younge, Womankind, 297-298). Younge like
Anne and Charlotte Bronte is deeply concerned with the needs of a single woman. In
her novels one finds the stuffy spinster the scandal – monger of the country / town
being replaced by a vision that is admirable and self-reliant. She presents two strategies
of realism – one marriage as a salutary return to normality and singleness accepted as a
dedicated service. Her novels explore individual female self-hood that comes to terms
with reality, but finds a voice of one's own. In The Heir of Redclyffe there is no
portrayal of strong-minded women. Laura Edmondstone however depicts a character
that needs an outlet for her energies and longs to do good, but is frustrated by social
circumstances. Like other Victorian writers, Younge experienced stressful dualities
involved in being both a women and a writer.

Charlotte Younge expresses through the family the recognition of the gap
between accepted views of womanly roles, and her own apprehensions of them. There
is a feeling of unease, wherein she manipulates conventional patterns of fiction in order
to formulate her personal sense of the complexities, of being a female. Her novel
expresses emotion rushed to fill the vacuum of experience, and critics found this
intensity, this obsession with personal relationships unrealistic. Through her obsession
with family and personal relationships, Younge tries to fill the gaps of her own life. Her
families are replete with all attributes necessary to give a picture of a complete and perfect family. It was something that she missed out in life. She conforms to the Victorian ideal of home and family, and unlike the Bronte sisters does not use family as platform for revenge, but only to overcome the loneliness in her life. She is a typical Victorian daughter and writer.

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell is described as a sweet gentle, utterly conventional Victorian woman, a supporter of women's movement, whose writing embodies a rational and radical social critique.

To be born a woman in the Victorian era was to enter a world of social and cultural deprivation, unknown to man. But to be born a woman and a Unitarian was to be released from much prejudice and oppression enjoined upon other women. (Lansbury 11)

Orphaned when she was just thirteen years old, Elizabeth Gaskell grew up with her aunt Mrs. Hannah Lumb, who was to her, a mother in the perfect sense. Living separately from her father and losing her only brother at a very young age, Gaskell recognized the importance of family and 'home'. As a novelist she has three main purposes, a concern for society, for individual's relationship with one another in family groups and for the single soul's struggles with itself. *Wives and Daughters* (1866) her last novel is a story of private and personal progress, where family is used to present social and moral issues that concerned Gaskell. Family relationships are central, and the focus is on father, daughter and stepmother, father and sons, father and stepdaughter with the action moving between four main families housed in The Towers (aristocracy), Hamley Hall (squirearchy), The Gibsons (professional Middle class) and Misses Brownings (town society). Through these relationships Gaskell challenges patriarchal
dominance within the family, and also exposes the injustice inflicted by upper classes. Gaskell here returns to a fictional world seen largely from a woman’s perspective.

The primary form of description is again the intrusion of outsiders into a previously secure domestic unit. Like Younge and the Bronte sisters, Gaskell uses this intrusion, as an effective means of dramatizing the threat of circumstantial pressures. At the center of the novel is Molly Gibson, the motherless daughter of Dr Gibson. The action moves with Molly proceeding to visit Hamley Hall, a circumstance that leads her father to re-marry, and provide a homely atmosphere for his daughter. Gaskell provides a critique of the “snobbishness, pettiness and selfishness” (W&D 144) in Mrs. Hyacinth Kirkpatrick Gibson, whose voice rises in sharp criticism when in private, yet speaks in company with “a sweet false tone which goes through Molly like the scraping of a lead pencil or slate” (W&D 331). Hyacinth disturbs the close bond that binds the Gibson home with her intrusion as Molly’s new mother. Family-relationships in *Wives and Daughters* are unusual, because only one family is complete with the component of husband, wife and children. The daughters Molly and Cynthia are orphaned of mother and father, Mrs. Kirkpatrick has no husband and Mrs. Hamley has no daughter. The themes of *Wives and Daughters* are “wholly concerned with family-relationships inviting one to consider ‘Mother’s and Children’ or the repellant term ‘Siblings’ as alternative summary titles which would comprehend the Hamley family which has neither wife nor daughter” (W.Craik 238). This choice of an incomplete family probably highlights Gaskell’s own incomplete family. Living apart from her own family, she never experienced the joy of living together with her father and brother. Gaskell tried her level best to instill the importance of kinship in her four daughters. This incompleteness was a common feature of Victorian families and became “a norm for central characters in the 19th century novel” (W.Craik 238).
The most vital relationship discussed in the novel is that between parent and child. At the core of the novel are Molly and Dr. Gibson whose mutual love, affection and understanding stands undisturbed. Molly knows no world beyond her home, sheltered and protected by her father, who wishes that she always remained the sweet innocent angel in the house. In contrast to them are Squire Hamley and his sons Osborne and Roger. United as a family by affection, they are however susceptible to bitter misunderstanding. Gaskell here portrays the pain caused by inability to communicate deepest feelings, and analyses the barriers to Osborne’s confiding in his father about his secret marriage. Many scenes are dramatized in vivid detail, to reveal the bitter feelings of hostility and resentment between father and son. But after Osborne’s death, the grief and remorse for his “delicate eldest-born, betwixt whom and himself there had been a coolness, is as touching in its reality as anything”(W&D 499).

The third relationship is between Mrs. Gibson and Cynthia where there is no trace of love and affection. Gaskell here demonstrates that family affection is never spontaneous. “The theme of parental loss or rejection is particularly powerful in Gaskell’s work and undoubtedly stems from the loss of her own mother and infrequent contact with her father”(Easson 472). Cynthia and her mother are so alien to each other that explanation is necessary. Cynthia’s admission that “it’s not in my nature to go into ecstasies and I don’t suppose I shall ever be what people call in love”(W&D 365) is clearly related to her neglected upbringing far away in boarding schools:

I love you Molly whom I have known for ten days, better than any one.

Not than your mother? Said Molly in grave astonishment.

Yes, than my mother! Replied Cynthia half smiling. Its very shocking, I dare say; but it is so. Now don’t go and condemn me,

I don’t think love for one’s mother comes by nature; and
remember how much I have been separated from mine... (W&D 196)

Gaskell here is pointing to her belief that "maternal love is not a natural attribute of every woman, and there was possibility of establishing this love between strangers or distant relations" (Lansbury 16). To highlight this belief she portrays the loving relationship between Molly and Mrs. Hamley. On her first visit to Hamley house, Molly finds a family role open to her. She becomes the substitute daughter that the Hamley's had lost, and also their future daughter-in-law. "Oh papa, I'm afraid Mrs. Hamley will miss me! I so like being with her." (W&D 177) After her father's second marriage, Hamley Hall becomes a second home to Molly and Mrs. Hamley the mother she had lost as a child. The Hamley's also look up to her in moments of crisis and she is ever present like a dutiful daughter. "I don't know what we should any of us have done without you. You've been like a daughter to my mother" says Roger when his mother is on her death-bed. (W&D 180)

The next family relationship portrayed in *Wives and Daughters* is that between husband and wife. This is explored through Dr. Gibson and Mrs. Gibson, Squire Hamley and his wife and the Cumnors with their degrees of intimacy. The novel upholds satisfactions of family and marital happiness, and unlike the Bronte sisters, has no place for challenging visions of female autonomy. This novel "seems in many ways, Gaskell's vindication of thirty years of married happiness" (Forster 178). Her juxtapositions of contrasting unions highlight diversities of family life. Though the squire loves and adores his wife, he crushes her individuality. Her compromise and self-sacrifice creates a stable marriage but breaks her spirit in the patriarchal system. Gaskell suggests "she would not have sunk into the condition of a chronic invalid if her husband had cared a little more for her needs or for her various tastes allowed her the
companionship of those who did.” (W&D 73) The woman here is portrayed as a ‘relative creature’ and Gaskell questions the level of commitment a woman shows in her husband and children. Gaskell cannot accept the traditional subordination of wife to husband, a victim overcome by being devoted entirely to others. Personally she “never idealized marriage and never saw it more than a working partnership between individuals of different tastes and inclinations” (Lansbury 17). Her own marriage was an unusual one in which both she and her husband led individual lives, despite Victorian calls to wifely obedience and domesticity. The most distressing portrayal of familial unease is that of the Gibsons. Mrs. Hyacinth Kirpatrick marries Dr. Gibson for her own satisfaction. She drags herself from one post of governess to another yearning for a day, when a man will keep her in a state of matrimony. This was a common predicament with most Victorian middle class women. Mrs. Kirkpatrick collapses into marriage with hysterical relief – “it was such a wonderful relief to feel that she need not struggle any more for a livelihood” (W&D 95). Dr. Gibson illustrates a typical masculine deficiency – the inability to understand a woman properly. Though he loves his daughter he is unable to comprehend her needs.

Molly is shattered by the loss of a loving relationship she was afraid of saying anything, lest the passion of anger, dislike, indignation – whatever it was that war boiling in her breast should find vent in cries and screams, a course in raging words that never could be forgotten. (W&D 99)

When Molly is upset over this unwelcome change in her family life, Roger gives her hope by telling her the story of another girl in a similar position and the advice “to try think more of others than of oneself” (W&D 105). She tries to adopt this policy but worries that she will lose her self and individuality by thinking of others. Gilbert and Gubar address this issue:
The surrender of her [the Victorian ideal of the angel in the house] self - of her personal comfort, her personal desires, or both - that is the beautiful angel - woman's key act, while it is precisely this sacrifice, which dooms her both to death and to heaven. For to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead.

(Gilbert& Gubar 25)

Molly Gibson is a good example of the balance Gaskell achieves between the Victorian ideal of the quiet domestic angel and the more aggressive woman. Dr. Gibson's bitter irritation at his domestic disharmony, vents itself in sarcastic outburst against his wife. Gaskell here deals with the subversive role of the wife and daughter. Dr. Gibson comes out as a typical patriarch when he tells Mrs. Eyre "Don't teach Molly too much; she must sew, and read and write but ... I am not sure that reading and writing is necessary ...its rather a diluting of mother wit, to my fancy"(W&D 29). This reveals the Victorian ideal of the daughter being taught only domestic work. Her portrayal of female characters conveys her awareness of the struggles of female individuality in a male dominated world. The wives in this novel are all subordinate pushed by husbands. Osborne's wife is compelled to lead a life of isolation although she yearns to live in her own home with her in-laws. The third family is the Cumner family who reveal a mutual confidence that survives the Earl's blundering, good-natured thick headedness, and his wife's domineering autocracy. Unlike her fellow novelists, Gaskell stresses on the assets rather than the inadequacies of family relationships. In May 1850 Gaskell wrote to Lady Kaye – Shuttle worth – "I am always glad and thankful to Him that I am a wife and a mother and am so happy in the performance of those clear and defined duties"(Gaskell 118). This comment drives home the difference between Gaskell and other women novelists. She probably escaped the emotional crisis and role questioning, which affected most of her contemporaries.
Her fictional portrayal of unhappy marriages indicates her recognition that matrimony as an institution has its own limitations. But this does not prove her dissatisfaction in family life. She emphasizes on the value of affection and existence of sound family relationship.

Gaskell is also interested in sibling relationship, which forms a vital part in any family set up. The genuine friendship that exists between the brothers Roger and Osborne Hamley and the stepsisters Cynthia and Molly is revealed in their actions. Before the arrival of Cynthia, Molly is eager to welcome her stepsister to her home—“Oh what a pleasure it would be to have a companion, a girl, a sister of her own age”(W&D, 190). Cynthia too reacts in a positive manner “I think I shall like you. I am so glad! I was afraid I should not.”(W&D 193) Molly always protects Cynthia against her father and supports her in moments of crisis. She cares so much for Cynthia, that she is resigned to the fact that she may have to be secretive and deceptive to help her. When Cynthia breaks off her engagement with Roger, Molly takes her in “her arms with gentle power”, laying “her head against her own breast, as if the one had been a mother and the other a child. Oh my darling! ... I love you dear dear Cynthia!”(W&D 491).

On the other hand Osborne and Roger share a mutual understanding and stand by each other. Roger tries his level best to sort the estranger relationship between Osborne and their father. Conscious of nuances in class distinctions in Victorian society, Gaskell targets injustice closely linked to authority structure. In the Victorian society even the best men regarded marriage as a transaction of rank and capital. The squire who had married the daughter of a merchant could never forget her lack of antecedents. It was his intention that Osborne should marry into a family higher and
richer in the social scale. It is however ironical that Osborne marries a Catholic French girl of “no family at all” (W&D 565).

When the squire breaks down, Roger his other son supports his sister-in-law and dwells on Aimee’s loving qualities and urges merit over rank: “Never mind what she was; look at what she is” (W&D 491). The Aimee plot illustrates the social change, taking place in society. The squire intends to pay Aimee off ignoring her rights to her child, seeing her merely as an agent who provides him with a grandson, a male heir. It is a powerful example of injustice that rises from issues of class polities. Gaskell also reveals through the theme of the family, social obligations that the aristocracy had to render to the public. The Cumnors are the local font of prestige; they pay less for goods because they possess the capacity to bestow prestige on those associated with them. They must display a spectacle constantly to amuse the lower class – “We’re a show and a spectacle” (W&D 565) – Lady Harriet the youngest Cumnor daughter shrewdly comments. Gaskell revealing the changing position of the aristocrat family and rising importance of professional men like Dr. Gibson and Roger Hamley precisely defines class relationships. *Wives and Daughters* subscribes to a myth of social change in which aristocracy resigns its hegemony.

Women related topics are an important aspect of *Wives and Daughters*. It portrays many types through the different families but none that resist conventional ideology. The central heroine Molly remains within the domestic sphere never venturing into the public world. The novel traces her growth from childhood, her relationship with her father / stepmother and stepsister to her emotional maturity which develops from involvement with family. Molly Gibson is the most unusual heroine, very similar to Charlotte Bronte’s idea of a dull, plain but interesting heroine called Jane Eyre. Although Dr. Gibson restricts Molly’s education, she succeeds by fighting
and struggling hard in getting French and drawing lessons. She even reads Scott's novels and is fired by Roger's scientific articles, but makes no moral or spiritual progress like Jane Eyre. A striking feature is her dependence on paternal guidance, which she continues to have even after growing into an adult. She seeks guidance from Roger who is her husband and mentor figure. Like Austen's novels, Gaskell's husbands are often substitute fathers or brothers. Molly is the crux of the novel, the cliché of Victorian fiction young women-angel, and Gaskell is searching for a rhetoric, to transform the conventional innocent heroine from figure of pathos, to one of power. Protecting her stepsister her developing selflessness comes out; when she questions the trust her father has on her. Cynthia represents a different kind of female selfhood. Conscious of her beauty and neglected by her mother, Cynthia suffers from a lack of love and feelings of rejection and cannot help "tickling the vanities of men" (W&D 264-265). Her presentation is a complex psychological triumph. In some ways Cynthia seems more like an alienated modern woman. The introduction of Aimee, Osborne's French wife and her child suggests "that the novel which started with a critique of Molly's various mother-substitutes was to end with some comment on alternative modes of motherhood" (W&D 360).

Through Aimee, Molly learns that determination is a powerful tool. When Aimee refuses to part with her child, Molly realizes that one must think of oneself before others. There is no need to crush one's spirit to be a good woman. Gaskell's treatment of womanhood is not conservative as she voices her dissent for contemporary mores. Her perceptions of the complexities underlying in a fulfilled womanhood, ironically was strengthened by her own situation. Conflict between professional and domestic duties pressurized her. She recognizes the dual tensions of womanhood and expresses her ambivalence about woman's roles. She never directly challenges the view
that marriage and motherhood represent the highest female fulfillment. "Echoing Bronte and Sewell she tries to resolve her dilemma by arguing that each individual must find appointed work" (Forster 140). All her heroines undergo a process of maturation and education which enhances her good qualities and decreases her weaknesses so that she can become a strong woman who stands up for the things she believes in, but who is also caring nurturing and loving: the embodiment of Victorian feminine virtue. Her heroines show Gaskell's faith in her sex as more than just the Victorian ideal of the ‘angel in the house’. She shows that they don’t pale in the face of adversity but change and adapt and become stronger for the challenge. The family is often seen as a microcosm of society through which Gaskell challenges traditional patriarchal power and authority. Gaskell has re-moulded family life as it can be used in art, and she stands back as a commentator so that facts speak for themselves.

Dinah Mullock Craik is a particularly interesting figure, not only for the discrepancies between her personal and her fictional version, but because her life fully illustrates the dichotomies of Victorian female roles. From childhood, she led an unconventional life than many of her contemporaries. Born in 1826, she suffered a tragic childhood, overcoming the shock of a father who neglected family responsibility. "The young Dinah, in a blaze of love and indignation carried her ailing and delicate mother away, and took in her rashness the charge of the whole family" (Oliphant 82). Dinah neither had the restricted and trivial accomplishments of the young lady with a finishing governess, nor the systematic learning imbibed by some of the contemporaries whose, father’s undertook seriously to supervise their education at home. After her mother’s death, her father deserted them completely, and refused to have anything to do with them or contribute to their support. The Mullock children wrote one trustee, "were left entirely destitute for a time till they could get employment…" (Read 70). Self-
dependent from the tender age of nineteen, she flourished professionally in a male-dominated world. It was family crisis that led Dinah to write and publish. The myth of male superiority was shattered due to the ambivalent relationship with the male members of her family. She could not help noticing that she was strong and successful while her father and brother were frustrated, drifting, plagued by mental instability and always dependent on her for financial support. In 1862, Ben her brother, came home suddenly and said “Sister I am going mad... you must take care of me” (B. Mulock, Dinah Mulock Craik 13-14). She looked after him but finally he had to be sent to a mental asylum, where he died in 1863. These shocking experiences developed in Dinah a deep craving for a home and a complete family. All her novels portray large families with father, mother, children, uncles & aunts, which was typical in Victorian families. Juliet Mitchell in her study “Dinah Craik and the Feminine Tradition” remarks that the ‘Home and ‘Family’ are the apotheoses of womanly fulfillment for Dinah, but she also opposed the stereotype of female passivity and dependence. Affected like the Brontes sisters and Younge, by the individualism of her Evangelical heritage, which taught her that all human souls were absolutely equal in God’s eyes, she believed that woman could and should be self-sufficient. After marriage she refused to accede to her husband’s wish to give up writing. Like Gaskell and Sewell she maintained financial autonomy, and insisted that women should not confuse feminine and professional roles. Though concerned with the woman question, she was out of touch with the present audience, because she firmly believed, that a woman’s natural position was in the home and the family. Family is used by Craik to explore ideals of her society, as well as to explore women’s hidden feelings.

Among all her novels it is John Halifax, Gentleman that emphasizes on the blessings of a happy family life. Published in 1856, it echoes the mood of great
Exhibition of 1851, celebrating British technology, industry and commerce. Craik provides a model to emulate, a vision of the world that should be. The novel is an archetypal story of a poor boy who succeeds in life through honesty, initiative and hard work. When the story opens, John Halifax is a boy of fourteen, supporting himself as a farm labourer. Like her contemporaries Younge, Gaskell and the Bronte sisters, Craik chooses an orphan as her protagonist whose first words are “Sir I want work; may I earn a penny?”(JHG 3). This recurring characteristic in all these writers drives home the importance of family in the life of an individual. Man is incomplete without a family, and a notable fact is that, all the writers dealt with in this study, come from incomplete families. The orphan was probably the persona, through which they tried to fulfill their yearning for a family. John Halifax finds work as a tanner in the tan yard of the Fletcher family. Like Heath cliff, Jane and Guy, John intrudes the secure family bond of father and son, but unlike the others who are rejected, he is welcomed warmly and in fact becomes the “only brother, friend and everything in the world”(JHG 213) for Phineas the invalid son of Abel Fletcher. With the help of the Fletcher family John educates himself, learns the technique of trade and like the class he symbolizes rises from subordinate position. He evolves from farm labourer to manual labourer, to clerk to apprentice to tradesman to manufacturer. When he saves Fletcher from food riots, he is taken in as his partner and this brings in changes to his status. He gets attracted to a gentleman’s daughter but class restriction holds them apart, till Ursula March flouts conventions and agrees to marry Halifax. The novel celebrates the domestic happiness of the Halifax family, and also highlights through the family the changing social conditions that were of concern to Dinah Mulock Craik.

*John Halifax, Gentleman* is often regarded as a social document that highlights the increasing popularity of the middle class. Through the families portrayed in the
novel, Craik brings to light the changes, the corruption and the decline that took place in the social strata. The stages of John’s rise relative to the old class hierarchy are indicated by two marriages. John Halifax marries the daughter of Mr. March, a gentleman. Craik here uses family to portray aristocracy’s conservative intransigence. When Ursula March extends a hand of friendship John warns her “society would not regard us as such ... Because you are a gentleman and I am a tradesman. ... Because we are not equals.”(JHG 149-150) But Ursula March is self-sufficient enough to ignore convention, and marry John Halifax:

No it does not signify. Were your father the king on his throne or the beggar in the streets, it would be all the same to me; you would still be yourself — my husband —my John Halifax. (JHG 199)

Ursula and John live in domestic content but on rather narrow means, as her trustee cuts her off from her inheritance. The second marriage that takes place thirty-three years later is between their daughter Maud, and an aristocrat Lord Ravenel. Halifax at first refuses the proposal, not because of difference in station, but because Ravenel is idle. Ravenel redeems himself by going to America and working as a clerk. When he inherits the estate, he sells it off to repay his father’s debts, and becomes plain William Ravenel, partner of the Halifax family firm, and a good bourgeois husband for Maud. Juliet Mitchell in another study “John Halifax, Gentleman: Epitome of an Age”, suggests that Craik here uses the family to incorporate aristocracy into a middle class value system. These two unions lend the sanction of aristocratic legitimacy to the new middle class. The strength of the middle class came from its inconclusiveness and its position in the center of society. The Halifax family preserves the nation by standing between aristocracy that has neglected social responsibility, and the poor who are too short sighted to understand this neglect. During flood riots the authoritarian, Abel
Fletcher, throws his grain into the river, rather than give in to the men, and they respond by threatening to burn his house. John stands in between, as he understands both hunger and prosperity. Craik here uses the family to emphasize her belief, that the middle class understands the feeling of both upper and lower classes. Here she echoes similar thoughts voiced by Anne Bronte in *Agnes Grey*. Anne Bronte also believed, that the middle-class were more sensitive than the cold and calculative aristocratic class. Craik reinforces social values by emblematic members, of the different families. Squire Brithwood and the Earl of Luxmore represent the failings of the upper class. Luxmore is a dissolute aristocrat more at home in France than in England, and is symbolically destroying his own country by cutting down trees on his estate, to pay off his debts. Squire Brithwood is an eighteenth century survival, a coarse, corpulent, drinking foxhunting squire who “allies himself with aristocratic decay by marrying Luxmore’s Frenchified daughter Lady Caroline” (Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik* 43). Lady Caroline’s appearance in the novel graphs the decline of aristocracy and ascent of middle class moral values. A wrong kind of class interaction is seen in the thoughtless egalite of Lady Coroline who patronizes John Halifax as a romantically idealized man of the people. The Brithwood family opposes the marriage of their cousin with John, because “he is a tradesman, a tanner, not fit for their society” (JHG 166). The squire refuses to part with Ursula’s inheritance – “Tell Ursula she may marry you or any other vagabond she pleases – it is no business of mine. But her fortune is my business … not one penny shall she get out of my fingers as long as I can keep it” (JHG 189). Craik here focuses on the gradual decline of aristocracy and uses the family as a platform to highlight this decline. Braving all odds Ursula March and Halifax marry and settle into domestic bliss.
John Halifax is a compendium of middle-class virtues and embodies the holy trinity of self-help, self-denial and self-control. He wastes no time in superficial society and his private life is entirely family centered. He may be an idealization of Craik’s beliefs about how “women would behave and what women could achieve if they had the freedom and independence that were granted to a male, even a male outsider” (Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik* 48-49). Model heroes are products of female fantasies that are concerned with power and authority. All her heroes were like Charlotte Bronte’s, women in disguise. These heroes are successful, living out the Victorian fairy tale, of upward mobility with single-minded energy that characterized their female creators. John Halifax rises from a beggar and towards the end of his life has a family estate, and a family farm. Some of John’s virtues raise traditional feminine traits to heroic structure. He meets rioters with persuasion instead of force, he quells anger with food, and he does not go to law for the money Brithwood owes just as a woman would not go to law. Even his gentle nurturing deep love for his children is admirable. He stands out as the model of a father figure. In contrast to the Victorian father who was a remote figure in his home, John has a special bond for his home and children. He was never happy away from his home and family. His foster brother Phineas Fletcher, who is the narrator of the story, is the invalid son of his late employer. It is commonplace in feminine fiction for the sensitive man to be represented as maimed or disabled, Craik’s inner territory is marked by illness, disability or a figure of the weak damaged human being. The ill or disabled male is an inevitable persona for the woman writer, who sees herself as being everyday like man except that she has less physical strength. Linton Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights*, Charles Edmondstone of *The Heir of Redclyffe* and Phineas Fletcher of *John Halifax, Gentleman*, all suggest that men condemned to life-long feminine roles display personality traits of frustrated
women. "They are insecure in their identity." (Showalter 127) Another characteristic of Craik's geography of family is that it is non-patriarchal. By rejecting the world of authority, she rejects their rigorous systems, irresponsibility, selfishness and repressed emotion. She destroys the need for daughters to become fixed in childish dependency because they worship adult male strength and power. Her heroines experience the emotional sense of isolation that allows her to achieve maturity.

Ursula Halifax is constructed on this principle. Left without guidance after her father's death she breaks laws and decides to go against convention by marrying a man of her choice much below her station. Craik showed an admiration for womanly individuality. She wrote to Mr. Wilde on 17th July 1887- "I like my women to be strong and brave - both for themselves, and as the helpers not the slaves or foes of men" (Craik, 49). Like Virginia Woolf she knows the value of a room of one's own. Ursula moves out of the trustee's house, when she begins to suspect that Lady Caroline is an unsuitable companion. But she startles neighbours when in later life she offers refuge to Lady Caroline. One important preoccupation of Craik's fiction is her intense maternal longing. Ursula Halifax is totally absorbed in motherhood and family duties. She is too much "The Mother" (JHG 215) and cannot survive beyond that role. Ursula breaks down completely when Guy leaves home due to antagonism with his brother Edwin. Guy cannot accept, that his brother and he love the same women - Oh, if it had been any one in the world except my brother!" (JHG 363). Once again it is an outsider, Miss Silver who breaks the secure bond of the family. Guy cannot continue to live with his brother, and tragedy strikes when he decides to leave his home and family. This maternal longing that leaves Ursula completely devastated, also haunts Lady Caroline who on the surface appears to be interested only in rank and riches. When Ursula reminds her of her dead child, Caroline reacts in anguish "I had forgotten. My little
baby! Oh, mon Dieu, mon dieu”(JHG 239). Craik’s novels reveal the emotional distress, a feeling of incompleteness, a yearning for something. The maternal instinct was to Craik, not merely the desire to give birth but the impulse to recreate in oneself the perfect, all-powerful mother. Women, Craik feels could transform their need to be dependent, protected and guided by recreating the atmosphere of total care while themselves becoming the nurturers.

Lady Caroline however is a contrast to Ursula Halifax. She attaches importance to status, never believes in subordination of women and clings in to a marriage, which is in total shambles. Her husband squire Birthwood is always at odds with her for various reasons. Leaving Lady Caroline to satisfy her elsewhere. Craik here reflects a woman’s feeling of loneliness and pain that are codified by lack of response and validation from a male. When she visits the Halifax family she declares, “I will break my bonds and live the life I was made for”(JHG 54). Craik’s treatment of marriage is complex and bold. Like Anne Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot she shows that “marital union while it can be supremely satisfying may prove a source of frustration and entrapment crushing womanly individuality”(Showalter 127). Though none of her heroines have to suffer brutality, many like Lady Caroline are lured into marriage by false idealism. She describes with chilling perceptiveness the misery of a women who has to struggle for security. In later life Lady Caroline screams out in terror when a mob stops her – “Let me go! My carriage is waiting. I am Lady Caroline Brithwood (JHG 408). Her husband refuses to recognize her and orders his man – “Drive on you fool ... Fetch the constable, some of you; take the woman to the watch house”(JHG 408). Craik touches the heart because her scripts express the wishes, hopes, fears, dreams, terrors, and controls them through the transforming power of situation and image. She resolved tensions and imagined solutions that gave women
space to trust their feelings and follow their desires. Craik did not break free into new territory but manipulated the stereotypes. Her heroines further their aims breaking emotional barriers — by recognizing feelings. The woman in the family has some advantage of competence that gives her a share of power in the family. Craik was therefore a strong representative of the feminine tradition who uses the family to explore women’s lives and her heroines do not affect their own society, although they find space and peace for themselves within the family.

*John Halifax, Gentleman* was an extremely successful book. It gave a dramatic form to the heroic myth of the middle-class family, made it compatible with the domestic setting, which satisfied reader’s needs and desires, and reflected their own beliefs. “Her novels are essentially explorations, not statements” (Forster 67). They clutch on to romantic conventions, and cannot be considered revolutionary. Craik does not overthrow the assumptions on which society is based, but she does ask that a fresh approach be taken. Her writing was coloured by the strong tension between her own experience of life and the cultural ideas that defined women.

The single thread uniting these writers is the depiction of facets of society, through the portrayal of the family. The family here acts as a persona, through which each writer voices her opinions and experiences, regarding class, gender, status of woman in a patriarchal society and views on the woman question. Together with these social concerns, the family also highlights their personal opinion as all three came from incomplete families. This is something that they share with the Bronte sisters. They also share common interests, but due to some reason, remained outside the horizon of mainstream fiction. They highlight the same issues raised by the Bronte sisters, and emphasize the importance of the family in Victorian society. It is through the family that their heroines try to find an identity in a patriarchal society.
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