TREATMENT OF VALUES IN THE
NOVELS OF GEORGE ELIOT

SYNOPSIS OF THE THESIS
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Purpose of Study:

Literature is an expression of the personality of the writer, and that personality itself is formed and moulded by the times in which he or she lives. It is more so in the case of a writer as sensitive as George Eliot. She is born in 1819 and her first novel is written in 1858. Thereafter, novel after novel flowed from her pen in quick succession. In other words, the formative years of her life were passed in the opening decades of the Victorian era. There was an intellectual ferment in England, such as had never been witnessed before. This spirit of questioning, this intellectual unrest is everywhere reflected in her works.

In the beginning of the Victorian era, there was a widespread faith in unlimited progress. This sense of self-satisfaction of complacency resulted from the immense strides that England had taken in the industrial and scientific fields. The nation was prospering and growing richer and richer everyday. The British empire was already a reality, the white man’s burden, or the colonizing mission of the English was already bringing in rich dividends. They attributed all this prosperity to their glorious and dominant Queen Victoria. It was an era of prosperity, an era of aggressive nationalism, an era of rising imperialism.
This break-up of Victorian Compromise, traditions and conventions was accelerated by the rapid advance of science. Science with its emphasis on reason rather than on faith, encouraged the spirit of questioning. Victorian beliefs, both religious and social were subjected to a searching scrutiny and found wanting. The publication of Darwin’s Origin of Species in 1859 is of special significance from this point of view. His celebrated theory of Evolution contradicted the account of Men’s origin as given in the Bible. His theory carried conviction as it was logically developed and supported by overwhelming evidence.

Before Eliot, the English novel had been almost entirely the work of those whose primary purpose was to entertain. Not that earlier novelist had lacked moral purpose; Richardson taught the passions to move at the command of virtue, and the same might have been said of Goldsmith in his *Vicar of Wakefield*. Of Thackeray’s moral feelings we can never be in doubt and Dickens, too, worked within a clearly suggested bunch of values. But no English novelist from Defoe to Thackeray could have been called man of great philosophical powers and unusual erudition. Their presentation of the human scene was never in any degree conditioned by the depth of their intellectual penetration or the profundity of their moral speculations. They were content to follow the patterns of thought of their day and to handle ideas only obliquely and symbolically. Their job was to entertain through the
construction of stories, not to exhibit new ideas. Though the poets in England traditionally moved in the intellectual vanguard, George Eliot was the first English novelist to move in the vanguard of the thought of learning of her days, and in doing so added new scope and dignity to the English novel. Unlike to accept simple supernatural sanctions for morality, the writers like Dickens and Thackeray found no alternative, except a facile appeal to feeling and as a result could not cope convincingly with moral problems like the suffering or death of a good character. George Eliot, who was both an idealist and agnostic and derived her idealism and agnosticism from her own intellectual inquiries into moral and religious question, had her own answers to these problems.

The daughter of a self-educated estate manager and land agent, Eliot grew up in rural Warwickshire, attending local boarding schools from an early age. From 1837 she acted as her father’s housekeeper, moving with him to Coventry in 1841. After her father’s death, Eliot lived briefly in Geneva, returning, in 1850, to act as de facto editor of the Westminster Review under John Chapman’s ownership. She wrote a series of successful novels: *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) followed by *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Mariner* (1861), *Ramola* (1863) and *Felix Holt* (1866). She also published two volumes of poetry (*The Spanish Gypsy*, 1868 and *The Legend of Jubal*, 1874). But it was the publication of *Middlemarch* (1871) and *Daniel Deronda*
(1876), which confirmed her status as one of the greatest 19th century Victorian Novelists. In all her fiction, Eliot was concerned with moral problems of characters but she never abstracted her characters from their environment in order to illustrate their moral dilemmas. She was well aware of the varied social contexts in which nineteenth-century men & women lived.

George Eliot took up novel writing very seriously. She was inspired by Jane Austen and considered her novels as models of unexaggerated depiction of real life. Those who want to have excitement and sensation through art, would be sadly disappointed by Austen’s works. In Eliot’s opinion, any kind of exaggerated picture or portrayal of human life or character is a sin against art; and that’s why, she could not appreciate the works of Mrs. Gaskell who used to point lights and shadows in most of her novels. She says with regard to her artistic creed, “My artistic bent is directed not at all to the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way, as to call forth tolerant judgment – pity and sympathy.” She firmly believed that the aim of the novelist should be always to give a faithful picture of things as they are in nature, not as they should be according to the wishes or desires of the artist.

The ambivalence of Eliot’s own social position was undoubtedly reflected in her equivocal relationship to subjects such as the woman issue or the public identity of the author. She was a writer of profound
intellect, blending contemporary science and philosophy into a secular realist ethic based on the principle that ‘if art does not enlarge men’s sympathies, it does nothing morally’. Actually Eliot was a natural descendant of the English Romantics and her novels are imbued with their scrupulous habits of description and essential conservatism. Although she was a formidable intellectual, she was concerned that general doctrine could eat out one morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow men. In her novels, she took up the romantic theory that human beings must overcome their egotism by the perpetual exercise of a vivid moral sympathy. Her art, like that of the great Romantics, reproduces the common universe, lifting the film of familiarity, which obscures from us the wonder of our being. The thesis aims to deal with moral vision dealt by George Eliot in her fiction. The study is confirmed to her four novels- *Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner, and Middlemarch.*

In all her fiction, George Eliot was concerned with moral problems of character, but she never abstracted her characters from their environment in order to illustrate their moral dilemmas. She was familiar with and responsive to the varied social contexts in which 19th century men and women could live; she saw the relationship between town and country, between landed families living in an ever diminishing feudal atmosphere and neighbouring provincial towns where farmer and tradesman, banker and politician, jostled each other in a word and
country metropolitan and provincial, agricultural, commercial, industrial, professional, and she used her knowledge to make her characters move naturally in their daily occupations.

In *Adam Bede* (1859), her first full-dress novel, has an element of pastoral idealism in the character of the hero which recurs at intervals in George Eliot's work; but it is significant that this note is connected with the dignity of work, with the capacity to fit in useful and happily to a social environment. Superficially. The plot of *Adam Bede* might be considered melodramatic, with its seduction of the pretty rustic maid by the squire and the sub-sequent excitement of infanticide and last-minute reprieve from the gallows, but these violent elements take their place in the context of the novel with an extraordinary quietness, deriving partly from the author's sureness of psychological touch-the seducing squire, for example is on villain of melodrama but a well-meaning if weak character presented throughout with a sympathetic understanding-and partly from her ability to anchor these events in the rhythm of daily life in the countryside. The whole novel has the air of a postlapsarian pastoral-no idealized story of shepherds and shepherdesses, but a story of virtue and vice confronting each other in a society where in the last analysis the dignity of labour and the simple virtues of faith and love can redeem life from squalor into peace and orderliness. True, the idealistic note is there, in the characters of Adam and Dinah, and the marriage of these two at the end moves from
probable to the almost purely symbolic; but there is sufficient earthiness in the novel as a whole to remind us that we are not in the Garden of Eden, but the modern world, after fall.

*The Mill on the Floss* (1860) is a more complex novel, but again one in which the moral problem of character are illustrated by the relation between one character and another, those relation in turn growing naturally out of the daily life and work of different members of a community. There is an autobiographical impulse in the novel which further complicates its patterns, giving it a pervasive emotion and sometimes an excessively high-pitched note so that at moments it reads like the work of a passionate and gifted adolescent.

*Silas Marner* (1861) a simple novel, much quieter in tone, is little more than a symbolic fable, though a brilliantly executed one. It has something of the tone of a fairy tale, with its story of a baby, left at the door of the lonely weaver after his gold had been taken from him, and the change in his character and way of life which his rearing of the baby brings. This novel of redemption might be considered as an antitype to Hawthornr’s *Scarlet Letter*, the latter being the story of the discovery of guilt and former of the rediscovery of innocence. In a sense, the novel is one of moral discovery, each of the more important characters learning the truth about himself or herself of what happens to him. But the ending is the least important part of the novel, whose richness of texture belies the simplicity of its conclusion.
There are other features of *Middlemarch* which contribute to making it one of the very greatest of English novels. The different characters and different contexts of living in town and country are shown interesting in their interests and activities in a way which is fruitful symbolic not only of the relationship between the individual and society, but also of one part of society with another. Country squire, clergymen, farmer, agricultural labourer, banker, doctor, workers and idlers in town and country, are shown in the complex network of interrelationships which itself is a microcosm of man in the world. The characters presented are thus more than individuals brought in as examples, illustration, psychological types, or carth real and symbolic, both highly individual portraits and organic parts of a carefully organized plot. The almost melodramatic apparatus George Eliot used to project certain important developments in the plot may strike the modern reader as somewhat forced, but it is not prominent enough to weaken the novel as a whole or to spoil the effect of life as it is lived, of provincial England at work, which is so important in the book.

It must be remembered that George Eliot was one of the Victorian ‘sages’ as well as novelists, one of those who worried and thought and argued about religion, ethics, history, character, with all concern felt by those most respective to the many currents of new ideas flowing in Victorian thought and most sensitive to their implications. A sage whose
moral vision is most effectively communicated through realistic fiction is an unusual phenomenon— or, at least, was unusual at the time when George Eliot began to write. If it has become less unusual since, that is because George Eliot by her achievement in fiction permanently enlarged the scope of the novel.
CHAPTER DIVISION

Chapter One: Introduction:
- Treatment of values-definition,
- Aspects- Love ethics, marriage
- Ethics, fraternal relationship,
- Parent child relationship,
- Aspirations and inner suffering,
- Economic ethics:

Chapter Two: Love Ethics:
- Upheld fidelity, rejected-
- Waywardness, rejection
  of adultery.

Chapter Three: Marriage Ethics:
- Extramarital affairs,
- Second marriage.

Chapter Four: Fraternal Relationship:
- Deep friendship, friends-
  become enemy.
Chapter Five: Parent Child Relationship:

Tribute to the parents, parents deceived by the children, biased nature of mother and father.

Chapter Six: Aspirations and Inner Suffering:

Inspiration of aspiration, realization of aspiration, inner suffering for aspiration.

Chapter Seven: Economic Ethics:

Cheating for economy, false Allegation, economic crime.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion
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