CHAPTER 3

The Concept of Womanhood in the Novels of George Eliot
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George Eliot, one of the most eminent Victorian novelists, analyses the feminist aspects, depicts female characters, and discusses the man-woman relationship and many other relevant aspects in order to highlight the concept of womanhood through her novels.

George Eliot, a well-known Victorian novelist, is also a modern writer in many respects. She is modern in the sense that she regarded the novel as a serious form of art and in her interest in the human psyche. She analyses the motives and mental processes which move her characters in a particular way. She also depicts the inner struggles of her characters and thus lays bare their souls before the reader.

George Eliot was the male pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans (later Marian), born in Warwickshire, England. She was the youngest daughter of her father, who greatly influenced her early life. She admired and respected him for making her the writer she was. She writes thus:

I considered him a parent so much to my honour that the mention of my relationship to him was likely to secure me regard among those to whom otherwise a stranger--my father’s stories from his life included so many names of distant persons that my imagination placed no limit to his acquaintanceship.¹

Her father appears as Adam Bede in the novel of the same name, and as Caleb Garth in Middlemarch. Her mother,

Christiana Evans, a woman of solid country stock, was Evan's second wife. Unlike the father, Christiana was not favourable in her attitude towards her plain faced youngest daughter. She disliked her for she felt that Mary was responsible for her broken health. She favoured her son, Isaac, and was proud of her pretty, well-behaved elder daughter, Chrissy. Mary felt isolated and unhappy and she was confined to her world of imagination. Isaac was close to her, on whom she showered her love and affection. She was also quite close to her father who was proud of her sharp intellect and bragged of it. In her early years, she accompanied her father in his business tours and drives through the countryside. They shared their experiences together. She enjoyed the beauty of the countryside in these travels with her father, standing between his knees while he drove leisurely, and thus acquired knowledge about life in the countryside. She grew familiar with the neighbouring farms, the countryside and its folk, which were preserved, in her memory. These references occur frequently in her novels. In this regard Leslie Stephen writes thus: "The impression made upon the girl during these years is sufficiently manifest in the first series of her novels." He adds that, in her childhood, Mary Ann was impressed by the sights and sounds of Nature and it makes her a great regional novelist.

Mary Ann grew and matured before the invention of steam engine and electric telegraphs. In her introduction to Felix Holt, she describes the world in which she lived to the following effect:

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1 Leslie Stephen, 3
...the glory had not yet departed from the old coach roads, the great road-side inns were still brilliant with well polished tankards, the smiling glances of pretty barmaids, and the repartees of jocose ostlers; the mail still announced itself by the merry notes of the horn.3

Her childhood marked by sensational feelings was spent in watching the passing of the two coaches, which ran between Birmingham and Stanford. She along with her brother watched this moving scene till coaches were replaced by railways.

Isaac was sent to school when Mary was five years old, who was also sent to a boarding school, kept by Miss Lathom at Attleboro, a village close by. But Ann could not continue her education because of the illness of her mother. She was held responsible for everything. Like Wordsworth's Lucy she was brought up in the lap of Nature. When Isaac returned from school, he spent the day riding a pony. Mary Ann was left alone and instead she turned to books. According to J.W. Cross (1885), she could get very few books and she read them again and again until she knew them by heart. She admired Aesop’s Fables and later, like her heroine, Maggie Tulliver, she became fond of the History of Devil by Daniel Defoe. She also read The Vicar of Wakefield with pleasure as also Joe Miller’s Jest Book, The Pilgrims’ Progress and Rasselas.

Robert Evans, Mary Ann’s father, saw the spark of intelligence in her and resolved to develop her hidden genius. He sent her to a better school kept by Miss

Wallington at Nuneaton. Here, she met Miss Maria Lewis, the governess, who took interest in her. Miss Lewis, being an ardent Evangelist intensified young Mary Ann’s religious fervour. Hence, Cynthia Grenier (2003) writes about Ann thus:

Fortunately, Maria Lewis, an assistant governess at the school, took the ugly duckling under her wing. For it should be noted here that Mary Ann was not graced by nature. In her adult life, people regularly made cruel remarks about her appearance...Through Miss Lewis, who was Irish by birth, Mary Ann was also drawn to Evangelicalism.  

Miss Lewis, being a sensitive person, felt that Ann required love and attention. Also she discovered her hidden intelligence. She therefore inculcated in her a love of literature.

Mary Ann’s parents did not condemn her deep attachment to religion. Miss Lewis, who recommended a diligent study of the scriptures, gave an opportunity to Ann to read the Bible repeatedly during her four-year stay at school.

At the age of thirteen, Mary Ann was sent to Miss Rebecca Franklin’s School. The broad Midland dialect that she had spoken all her life was replaced by a cultivated speech at this school. During her stay there she was admired by her friends for her musical voice. She received lessons in music, drawing, English History, French and arithmetic. Miss Rebecca made her translate some pages of Maria Edgeworth’s novels into French. She also read the

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novels of this novelist, who was considered the first regional writer. Ann also read a number of English writers including Shakespeare, Milton, Young, Cowper and Byron. She also read the novels of Bulwer Lyton and Sir Walter Scott. She was, in fact, profoundly influenced by Scott, who first introduced her to the writing of fiction. She not only discovered through Scott the possibilities of fiction but his fundamentally Tory imagination also encouraged her in the use of dialect. This was essential for the portrayal of the life of rustics and peasants of the Midland.

As Christina Evans, Ann’s mother, died her formal education came to an end. Her sister got married, and, therefore, Ann was left alone to take care of the house. She tried to replace her mother at home and to be a good asset to her father. In the evenings she would read to him the novels of Scott for he loved the author. Though she left school, her education continued for she read incessantly along with her other responsibilities. Her father arranged tutors for her to study German, Italian and music. Her religious zeal and interest in Evangelical religion governed her thought and feelings as are reflected in her novels.

Her Evangelical fervour was later replaced by Secular matters. She read the Romantics and took keen interest in Wordsworth, Byron, Shelly, Coleridge and Southey. Wordsworth was her favourite author. She was impressed by his philosophy and his attachment to the common man. This influence is traceable in George Eliot’s novels.

In 1841, Robert Evans decided to retire in favour of his son, Isaac. He and Mary Ann shifted to a house called Bird Grove in Coventry. Here she came into contact with the
Brays and their friends. Bray influenced Mary Ann very deeply. Cynthia Grenier (2003) describes this new relationship thus: "Mary Ann found Bray immensely stimulating intellectually, and he responded eagerly to the young woman's keen questing mind." Bray's house, Rosehill, on the outskirts of the city, was a centre of local intellectual life and activity, and the novelist came to know intellectuals like Robert Owen and Ralph W. Emerson through Mr. Bray. She thus came into contact with many intellectuals of the time. Her beliefs were deeply shaken and she became a victim of doubts and conflicts for which Mr. Robert Evans blamed the Brays. And still she got some benefit from this contact with the Brays. When the new wife of Bray's brother-in-law was unable to work on a translation she had begun of David Friedrich Strauss' celebrated work Das Leben Jesu (The Life of Jesus), Mary Ann was asked to take over the task and she spent two years to complete the work.

Robert Evan's life came to an end in 1849 and the Brays took Ann with them on a tour of Europe. When they returned, she stayed behind in Switzerland. On her return to England, she found everything changed. She felt lonely and constantly visited the Brays, where she met John Chapman, a young publisher, who was about to buy the Westminister Review, a contemporary periodical. Chapman wanted to revive it through publishing articles written by eminent critics and writers. He was impressed by Mary Ann's sharp intelligence and asked her to join him as an assistant editor. She thus visited London frequently.

3 Cynthia Grenier, 2
Chapman was married but he had a governess-mistress named Miss Tilly. He had an affair with Marian. Both wife and mistress began to resent this love relation and managed to send her away. Joan Bennett (1962), in this regard, quotes Chapman's words from his diary about the miserable state of Mary Ann:

M. departed today. I accompanied her to the railway. She was very sad, and hence made me feel so. She pressed me for some intimation of the state of my feelings. I told her that I loved E and S also, though each in a different way. At this avowal she burst into tears. I tried to comfort her and reminded her of the dear friends she was returning to, but the train whirled her away very very sad.\(^6\)

This experience almost shattered her emotionally and yet she yearned to be a wife and mother. Bennett thought she would never get married. Chapman, however, felt that he needed her assistantship and urged her to return. She accepted the offer as a business deal and suppressed all her tender feelings of love. Ann thus got recognition for her intellectual powers. As one of the editors of Westminster Review she came into contact with eminent writers like Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle, Emerson, Harriet Martineau, Mrs. Gaskell, Forster and Louis Blanc. They all recognized her talent and she was never condemned.

Herbert Spencer, an important contributor to the Westminster Review, attracted by Mary Ann's intellect became her close friend. Both of them had many things in common and Mary became emotionally attached to him but as he did not show any inclination to marry her they merely

remained good friends. Spencer introduced her to G. Henry Lewes, a contributor to the periodical. He was two years older to her and he came from a different background. When she met him he had acquired a good deal of fame in literature. He was also a literary critic, novelist and actor. He also had knowledge about European literature. His works included literary biographies, children's books and natural history. His personal life was rather unhappy. His wife, Agnes, was beautiful and talented. Lewes's friend, Thoronton Hunt, who was a frequent visitor to their house and with whom he freely exchanged views about love attracted the attention of Agnes. G. Lewes got shocked but overlooked his wife's flexible nature and pretended to conceal his bitterness. He also could not divorce her according to the Victorian laws prevalent at that time.

George Lewes was extremely attractive and was popular amongst all. He was a good conversationalist, too. In appearance he was plainer than Mary Ann. Hence his handsome personality and sense of wit attracted Mary. He was also an admirer of her intellectual beauty. He offered her love and affection. He could respond to her emotional need. She was seriously inclined towards him and became his mistress. Ian Adam (1969), hence, comments on this relationship to the following effect: "..., in 1854, came the action which was to scandalize her society, cast her out from her family, and open her career as a novelist." Adam also adds that Lewes gave Mary Ann emotional security and intellectual stimulus she needed to blossom forth. Her

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family and friends were wonder-struck and the two together enjoyed moments of pleasure they were seeking for.

They left for Germany for a change in 1854, as Lewes was not well. During their stay in Berlin, Marian found a story she wrote a long time ago. She showed it to Lewes who admired her power of observation. Joan Bennett comments on it to the following effect: "the creative gift in her, which he did so much to discover and to foster, produced books of timeless value while his own voluminous works were in their very nature ephemeral." Further Lewes encouraged her to write a story, *The Sad Fortunes of Rev. Amos Barton*. The story was published under the pseudonym of George Eliot by Blackwood. J.W. Cross points out that since 'George' was Mr. Lewes's Christian name and 'Eliot' was an easily pronounced name Ann chose this pen name; while Ian Adam writes, "She adopted the pseudonym George Eliot, partly to avoid the prejudice against women writers, and partly, one suspects, to shield herself from direct criticism to which she was always hypersensitive."

George Lewes's admiration cast an influence on George Eliot and she turned into a novelist. It was through Lewes that she discovered her genius. He also saved her from harsh criticism of the men of letters. She therefore blossomed forth as a writer due to his abiding influence and love. She repaid for what he did for her by dedicating the manuscript of *Felix Holt* to him and by taking charge of his wife, Agnes, and his three daughters after his death.

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8 Joan Bennett, 47.
9 Ian Adam, 3
With Lewes's death on November 30, 1878, the literary career of George Eliot came to an end. It was a great setback to her literary career and she expressed her desolation and deprivation through letters. Later, George Eliot married a twenty years younger friend, J.W. Cross, an American banker, on May 6, 1880. They went to Italy and probably during their stay in Venice he died by jumping from the balcony of a hotel. She died of a kidney ailment the same year on December 22. In her will she expressed her wish to be buried in Westminster Abbey, but Dean Stanley of Westminster Abbey did not allow it and Eliot was buried in Highgate Cemetery.

The period of Eliot's literary career stretches from 1857, when her first collection of stories was published to 1876, the year of publication of her last novel Daniel Deronda. She wrote eight novels altogether, a verse-drama, one volume of poetry, and one of the critical essays. Her pen-name continued throughout her lifetime. Her novels fall into two groups, the first includes her early novels: Scenes of Clerical Life (1857), Adam Bede (1859), The Mill on the Floss (1860), and Silas Marner (1861) which evoke memories of Midland-life during her girlhood; while the second group includes her late novels: Romola (1863), Felix Holt, the Radical (1866), Daniel Deronda (1876), in which she takes new aspects of life; and Middlemarch (1872) in which she returns once again to her favourite Midlands.

Eliot's greatest landmark was her treatment of realism in her works. She brought perfection to the genre of psychological realism which was later on treated very well by the American novelist, Henry James. She brought Art
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close to life, observed truths and coherently presented the psychological motives of characters. Dr. Karen A. Driosen, in an article on George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, writes thus:

Eliot’s novels are often compared to those of Leo Tolstoy: literary historians tend to regard her as among the most talented and influential Realist novelists in England. Literary critics typically distinguish Eliot’s fiction from that of her contemporaries by pointing to its effective integration of close psychological studies of her characters and intellectually rigorous philosophical arguments.10

It was indeed George Eliot who created characters with moral dilemmas, which are timeless.

Elaine Showalter, in her *Sexual Anarchy* (1990), traces the history of the reception of George Eliot’s work and her reception by women writers and critics. Showalter regards George Eliot a queen among Victorian novelists. As a literary figure, Showalter writes, Eliot was also a male by her pseudonym for she wrote with masculine authority and intellect. Eliot had a man’s brain and woman’s heart. Eliot’s death brought an end to the tradition of writers of both genders fighting for supremacy as new voices promoting a new form. Those who succeeded her had to evolve a typically new feminine style.

George Eliot was the target of criticism in all kind of ways. Some critics approved her fine sense of morality, her vivid characterization and her realism. Others disapproved her characterization and regarded her inferior to Jane Austen for she indulged in exaggeration. Some thought she imitated Jane Austen. But in fact Austen dealt with familiar

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types, whereas Eliot laid bare extraordinary souls. The first portrayed characters found in polite circle but George Eliot depicted social rebels with ideas and ideals. In Eliot's novels both male and female protagonists yearn for perfection and rebel against the world around them. Despite certain similarities that are found between Jane Austen and George Eliot, Eliot was original in every respect. Comparing the two novelists, Philip V. Allingham (2001) writes thus:

Like Jane Austen, Eliot employs a series of social gatherings such as the young squire's twenty-first birthday festivities and the Poyser's harvest home in Adam Bede to inter-relate her characters and bring new characters on stage, as in Book One, Chapter Eleven, of Middlemarch. Unlike Austen, Eliot does not maintain the convention of presenting certain good characters ("true wits") with whom the reader is expected to identify in order to learn virtue (for example, Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice). Eliot does, however, utilize essay-like asides to offer her philosophical interpretations of life.¹¹

Eliot probes deeply into the obscure recesses of human nature, and deals in a variety of ways with those spiritual conflicts and moral disorders which delineate human characters and show their fall from greatness. The tragedies are caused by some moral weakness, and Eliot shows how that moral weakness brings about inner disorder leading to utter ruin of the person concerned. Each individual is therefore a maker or destroyer of his destiny. And this is applicable to both male and female characters.

Eliot's art of characterization is remarkable. Hence she is regarded as conspicuous amongst typical Victorians. Like

most contemporary female writers, Eliot drew upon her own experiences in the presentation of male and female characters. She was also exceptional in presenting very impressive male and female characters. Her characters grow and develop during the course of the novel. They are very dynamic characters, are warm and full of vitality, having human desires and weaknesses.

One fails to assess whether George Eliot presents conventional or unconventional female characters in her novels. Also critics do not agree if this nineteenth-century novelist is feminist or anti-feminist. Some critics place her in the category of a committed progressive, who is compassionate towards women and feels unhappy about their confinement. Also the critics point out that Eliot has created strong and rebellious women who oppose the dominant patriarchal culture. Eliot, in her novels, shows that patriarchy prevents women to fulfil their desires and aspirations. Hence they become helplessly dependent on men. Further the critics conclude that Eliot feels disheartened regarding her mission of feminism. Her women are fragile for none of the brilliant, aspirant, gifted, beautiful and philosophical female characters usurp male roles, demand the vote, petition for divorce, or verbalise the inequity of gender codes.

These views are rather prejudiced for Eliot’s works are critical regarding the dominant patriarchal culture. She counterbalances both patriarchy and feminism. Eliot makes the talented heroines in her novels fully dependent on men for she has a realist approach in this regard. Thus Eliot depicts the plight of women of her time. A critic, therefore,
points out that Eliot does not moralise about the rights of women but reminds one of the duties of women. Edith Simcox (1881), in an article about George Eliot, writes to the following effect:

She gave unqualified an unhesitating assent to what might be called the most 'advanced' opinions on this subject [i.e. the whole subject of the rights and position of women]; only the opinions had to be advocated in practice with large tolerance and disinterested, and she wished to be assured that nothing of what is valuable in the social order of the past should be sacrificed in the quest of even certain future good. In matters intellectual she had, what is perhaps equally rare in men and women, the same standard for both sexes.12

In most of her novels, George Eliot reflects on the ill-treatment of women and the painful consequences of the patriarchal system that denies women any right that they deserve; the problems relating to matters of love, marriage and education; the place of women in the Victorian age; the problem of self-negation on the part of young girls who are brilliant and aspire to achieve their objectives; the exploitation of poor young girls at the hands of upper class men, etc. Anne Wiese (2001), in an abstract of her 'Images of Women in George Eliot's Middlemarch, writes thus:

Throughout the Victorian era, women were regarded as ornamental and passive 'Angles in the House' with a natural responsibility for home and children. The ideal of the tender and submissive angel served as a powerful role model for middle-class and upper class women. It permeated all fields of art and public

Hence Eliot's work challenges the conventional views regarding women's place in society.

The issue relating to gender conflict is clearly noticeable in the treatment of Eliot's female characters who represent the poignancy of unfulfilled potential and repressed desires in a world dominated by men who are supposed to be partners in life rather than masters. Women were expected to remain dependent on men and deal only with trivial matters. The female protagonists, from Maggie Tulliver to Dorothea Brooke, are victims of male domination and abide by this inferior position given to them. In *Middlemarch* (1872), Eliot has defined in precise terms what men and women should do within society. The emphasis falls on women who are targets of attack. Dorothea Brooke, the heroine, a beautiful and intelligent girl, is goaded by ambitious designs in life. She is urged upon to adjust herself according to other people's ideas and also accept male leadership throughout. This highly ambitious young girl is, unfortunately, trapped by a number of men and falls a victim to her own submissiveness from the beginning and her potential remains dormant. The first to trap her is her uncle, Mr. Brooke, who constantly tries to belittle her and her class as "Young girls don't understand political economy", and he will not "let young ladies meddle with his documents" as "young ladies are too flighty" in his opinion. Even in matters relating to her marriage, Mr. Brooke does

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not offer advice but rather reflects on the Victorian man's views on man-woman relationship by stating that marriage "is a noose, you know. Temper now. There is temper. And a husband likes to be master".

In the second phase of her life, Dorothea is herself responsible for being subjected to a man's control. She takes a wrong decision that leads to her suffering in later life. She chooses to marry a middle-aged scholar, Edward Casaubon, for she admires his intellectual beauty, but he does not come up to her expectations. Dorothea can be judged in two ways, her adolescent views on marriage and her hasty decisions:

Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the Parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects...Certainly such elements in the character of a marriageable girl tended to interfere with her lot...

It also reflects on the misconceptions of a husband and her views on marriage:

And how should Dorothea not marry? a girl so handsome and with such prospects? Nothing could hinder it but her love of extremes, and her insistence on regulating life according to notions which might cause a wary man to hesitate before he made an offer, or even might lead her at least to refuse all offers. A young lady of some birth and fortune, who knelt suddenly on a brick floor by the side of a sick labourer and prayed fervidly as if she thought herself living in the time of the Apostles...,  

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15 George Eliot, 7
Dorothea may also be viewed in terms of self-sacrifice. She degrades herself and her intelligence and decides to stand by her future husband to enable him acquire intellectual success. She is highly impressed by the scholarship and learning of Casaubon and confesses: “what a lake compared with my little pool”. She hopes to inculcate his knowledge and experience. Casaubon turns out to be dismal, selfish and domineering. He seeks her assistance but retains his impulse to control the opposite sex, a typical model of patriarchy.

Thus, George Eliot throws light on the effects of wrong choice and the disinterestedness of young girls in highly serious matters of marriage. The mothers play an ignoble role in this regard who do not give suitable guidance to their daughters. Ken Thompson (2001) comments on the ill-effects of fatal marriages in Eliot’s *Middlemarch* and writes thus:

In the absence of the female perspective on the topic of marriage, Dorothea and Celia are still orphans to the selection process of good husbands... Dorothea was in need of “the bridle” of motherhood, sadly lacking on Mr. Brooke’s estate.16

Thompson further points out that the non-existence of a mother in Dorothea’s life resulted in the selection of an undesirable husband. Ken Thompson is of the opinion that had she demanded her rights and privileges in a proper way her husband would have known the relevance of mutual cooperation in married life. Instead, Eliot’s character, Miss

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Broke, has no regard for the narrator’s advice “A woman dictated before marriage in order that she may have an appetite for submission afterwards”. Marcus Wichik (1997) also expresses the same views:

It is not love that attracts Dorothea to the corpse-like Casaubon, rather her sense of duty; her desire to be like one of Milton’s daughters. Dorothea, orphaned at a young age, would seem to long for a husband who can fill the role of the father she lost.\(^\text{17}\)

In her final novel entitled *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot reflects on the theme of gender. It brings to light the effects of unsuitable marriages and the sufferings of women in this regard. Gwendolen, the female protagonist, is beautiful, proud, ambitious and strong. The critics consider her a symbol of ideal womanhood. She is presented as a woman possessed with excessive desires that lead to her suffering. Patricia Vigderman (1998) compares Gwendolen to Dorothea Brooke in the following words:

Like Dorothea, she has a vague sense that she could have a life larger than anything she’s seen at home, but lacking Dorothea’s ardent temperament, she simply “meant to do what was pleasant to herself in a striking manner; or rather, whatever she could do so as to strike others with admiration and get in that reflected way a more ardent sense of living, seemed pleasant to her fancy.\(^\text{18}\)

Though strong she is prejudiced towards men, “I shall never love anybody, I can’t love people. I hate them”. Gwendolen

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marries Grandcourt who turns out to be a brute who wants to lead a woman by the nose:

“She had been brought to accept him in spite of every thing--brought to kneel down like a horse under training of the arena, though she might have an objection to it all the while. On the whole, Grandcourt got more pleasure out of this notion” (28: 269-70).

Further he “meant to be master of a woman who would have liked to master him” (28: 270).

In Victorian age, women held a position no better than animals that were subservient to their masters. Gwendolen’s ulterior motive with regard to marriage, unlike that of Dorothea’s, is money and position, and Grandcourt is a man of wealth and rank. She visualized a comfortable life for her mother and three younger sisters. Though one pities her for sacrificing her youth, ambition and even womanhood for the sake of her family, yet one cannot overlook her seduction of money. It is at the end she realizes that “he had won her by the rank and luxuries he had to give her; he had fulfilled his side of the contract...the husband to whom she felt that she sold herself...” (54: 573). The truth is revealed when Gwendolen learns that Grandcourt had four children by Lydia Glasher, whose story resembles that of Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede and Molly Farren in Silas Marner, all being representatives of female exploitation or rather victims of aristocracy. Patricia Vigderman disapproves the meeting between Gwendolen and Lydia to the following effect:

More terrifying in this encounter than what she has just learned about Grandcourt is the implied female powerlessness she shares with this unhappy woman:
"It was as if some ghastly vision has come to her in a dream and said, 'I am a woman's life.'"  

The woman seeks refuge from an oppressive husband not by standing on her own feet but directing her attention towards Daniel Deronda. The same is true of Mirah, Daniel's wife, who fell in love with Daniel and married him to escape from a tyrannical father.

In *Romola*, which describes fifteenth-Century Florence, George Eliot deals very well with the issue of gender and provides another stance of patriarchy, and asserts the fact that she is feminist. Romola, the heroine, is a victim of male oppression due to no other reason but the simple fact that, like Dorothea and Gwendolen, she is a woman and her sex is the object of oppression in the hands of her most beloved ones, her ungrateful father and a deceitful husband.

Romola is the devoted daughter of her father, Bardo, and resigns her will to his wishes. Bardo is shown as a "moneyless blind old scholar", who dreams of making his daughter a source of income to bear the expenses of his library and hence he pays especial attention to her studies. Romola patiently endures his ceaseless demands as he grows older. Yet Bardo, a typical patriarch, wishes his son, Dino, who has left his ancestral home to become a friar. Unlike her brother, Romola takes charge of her father forever. Though she is more inclined to studies than her brother the father fails to admire her. Also he is rather prejudiced towards her and does not approve her talents. According to him, her deficiencies as a scholar spring from her "feminine mind", and her strength is her "man's nobility".

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19 Patricia Vigerman, 9
of soul”. Romola good-humouredly accepts all criticism and remains faithful to the end.

Romola goes from the tyrannical father’s guardianship to the protection of an arrogant and deceitful husband, named Tito. She tries to adjust for a short while but when she learns that Tito sold her father’s library for his personal monetary gains, she turns rebellious. She resolves to give up the marriage contract and leave the man. In this regard, Romola resembles Anne Bronte’s heroine of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Helen Huntingdon. She follows the advice of Savonarola, who convinces her to stay with her husband. Thus she uses “all the energy of her will into renunciation”. She, later, learns that Tito had abandoned his step-father; and had two children from a mistress, whom he had lured into a relationship followed by a fake marriage ceremony. Romola is in a state of conflict whether to give up her husband or not. She is torn between the demands of “an outward law which she recognized as widely-ramifying obligation”, and her moral sense to do the right thing. She, further, seeks refuge in the person of Savonarola, who disappoints her. She, eventually, decides to end her life and sails in a boat “with a great sob...that she might be gliding into death”, but she wakes up to find herself in the surroundings of the “speckless sapphire-blue of the Mediterranean”.

Most women in George Eliot’s novels fail to escape from their crucial fate imposed on them by a patriarchal society which grants complete authority to men who tend to dominate women. They play the role of oppressors in the guise of a father, husband, brother and son. This gender
conflict and its ill consequences are shown in George Eliot’s characters who represent life in all its shades. The discussion of gender-based problems that Victorian women faced is also reflected in the story of Maggie Tulliver, the heroine of *The Mill on the Floss*, who is a true representative of George Eliot. Maggie Tulliver is beautiful, precocious, and intelligent but, unfortunately, her virtues got no recognition. Like her creator, Maggie is also passionate and sensitive. She suffers from early childhood. Maggie was always ridiculed by her parents and brother if she showed any inclination to make inquiries about things.

Despite her spark of intelligence, Maggie was deprived from the facilities of acquiring education for women were thought inferior in this regard. Tom, though less intelligent than Maggie, believes that because she is a girl, she is “too silly” to learn Latin. He, no doubt, represents the patriarchal system in its injustice shown towards women. Tom shared the common belief that women should be confined to their homes and should not be allowed to acquire education. And, in this regard, Maggie faces the same problem as Dorothea, Gwendolen, Romola, and Rosamond do.

Maggie Tulliver, moreover, has to stick to certain social norms and ideals, especially relating to romance and marriage. She belongs to a world where in gender conflict men prevail and women are given an inferior position. Maggie, who is rebellious by nature, will not accept submission to any confinement. Reacting against the limitations imposed upon her by her family, she decides to lead a life of deprivation and penance; she also has a cordial
relationship with Philip Wakem against her father's wishes. It is Tom, again, who reminds her of the "duty" to her father.

Later on, she engages herself in a sensuous relationship with Stephen Guest, her cousin's handsome suitor. Further, she has to choose between a life of passionate love with Stephen and her "duty" to her family and position; and she chooses the latter. This does not prove beneficial forever and George Eliot, unexpectedly, unites her with her oppressor, Tom, "There was no choice of courses, no room for hesitation, and she flooded into the current".

George Eliot thus shows her readers that, in nineteenth-Century England, even those who claim themselves to be radical believe that women are inferior to men. In *Felix Holt, The Radical*, Harold Transome, the lord of the Transome Estate, comes back home with some radical views and intends to change the lot of the entire country, except that of women. Harold also believes that women are silly creatures who do not have any ability, nor right to discuss what he considers "men's work", such as politics and running estates. This, in fact, is the real lot of women in a male-dominated society. The first thing Harold does after his return is to declare his mother an "invalid" and to choose to run the estate himself despite the fact that Mrs. Transome did the job well in his absence. The same happens with Mrs. Holt, whose son, Felix, does not allow her to sell her homemade remedies for illnesses though she has no one to depend on when he is thrown into prison. In
her novels, George Eliot depicts the miserable plight of women.

In Eliot's works, social problems and gender conflict are taken up together. From a Marxist's point of view, George Eliot is a realist novelist to the core. Unlike most of her contemporary writers, Eliot does not concern herself with the external conflict relating to individuals of the same community (i.e. the rich and the poor); rather she depicts the inner conflict within the character concerned, which is caused due to his/her social position (class) and the consequences that follow this conflict. This is evident in her treatment of some female characters who suffer and struggle on account of their inferior position in society. It is very well illustrated through the character of Rosamond Vincy, who, though young and beautiful and approved by all in Middlemarch, is yet dissatisfied with her present status and wishes to find a man who would help her to get rid of the bitter life led in a middle class society. She is particularly aware of her social standing and feels that "she might have been happier if she had not been the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer. She disliked anything which reminded her that her mother's father had been an inn-keeper." This spoils her marital life. Instead of admiring her husband's busy life-style and making his life pleasant, Rosamond is involved in trivial activities like selecting good furniture for their house and expressing a desire to go to London and imitate the current fashions prevalent there. It leads to utter disillusionment. She does not act according to the expectations of her husband, Lydgate. She is very selfish and thinks only of her requirements. In his absence
she borrows money for her unnecessary expenditure while her husband is already in debt. Even during the period of professional turmoil and financial strain Lydgate feels that Rosamond is remaining "utterly aloof from him". Instead of being cooperative, Rosamond proves to be a deceptive person. She thinks in terms of her own selfish ends, cares for public opinion and her status in society, and ignores her husband altogether.

Hetty Sorrel, in *Adam Bede*, is yet another example of a woman who is responsible for her utter failure in life due to her rebellious nature and lack of far-sightedness. Hetty, whose beauty is "like that of kittens, or very small downy ducks making gentle rippling noises with their soft bills, or babies just beginning to toddle and to engage in conscious mischief" is conscious of her physical charm that attracts several men like Luke Briton, Mr. Craig and also Adam Bede, whom her uncle considers the best suitor for her. Though an orphan and also poor, she is constantly daydreaming and remains in a state of disillusionment. Though Adam is the best suitor for her, she does not wish to marry him for he is poor enough to afford the luxuries she dreams about. She thus feels inclined towards Arthur Donnithorne, the heir to the local estate, who can, according to her, satisfy all her desires, "to sit in a carpeted parlour and always wear white stockings, to have some large, beautiful ear-rings, to have Nottingham lace round the top of her gown and something to make her handkerchief smell nice". But as Eliot puts it, "young souls, in such pleasant delirium as hers, are as unsympathetic as butterflies sipping nectar". It is this wayward attitude towards life that leads Hetty to give way to
the seduction of young Arthur, who runs away, leaving her pregnant and in a state of despair. She therefore decides to leave Loamshire in order to look for him. On her way, she gives birth to a child, whom she abandons to die. She is, therefore, arrested and put into prison.

Eliot also describes the exploitation of poor women at the hands of upper-middle class or upper-class men. Hetty Sorrel, Molly Farren, Lydia Glasher and many others have been presented as victims of such ill-treatment.

In addition to the above-mentioned female characters, Eliot has also portrayed some rare and unforgettable pictures of gifted women like Mrs. Poyser, Daniah Morries, Celia Brooke, Mrs. Grath, Eppie, and many more. This variety shows Eliot’s unique conception of women and her realistic presentation of them in her novels. To support this argument one may quote Leslie Stephen, who writes to the following effect:

I must repeat that George Eliot was intensely feminine, though more philosophical than most women. She shows it to the best purpose in the subtlety and the charm of her portraits of women, unrivalled in some ways by any writer of either sex; and shows it also, as I think, in a true perception of the more feminine aspects of her male characters. Still, sometimes she illustrates the weakness of the feminine view.20

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