

**Tribhuvan University**

Irony of Marriage In Patriarchy in *Middlemarch*

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## **Abstract**

*Middlemarch*, inscribed in the Victorian time, presents a picture of females who get socially forced to be unified in the marriage bond with the expectation of being secure and safe. But their wishes and longings eventually get shattered due to the male chauvinist nature of the society and they just become dependent and puppets in the hands of their husbands who express their male ego in distinct ways and oppress them thinking that they are naturally superior and made to guide the woman sex. Dorothea, the central figure, undergoes the similar ordeal of conjugal life and bears different ups and downs in the bond of marriage. What she initially thinks and expects from Mr. Casaubon, twice older than her, remains just her dream. Moreover, her marriage with him becomes the source of misery, discontentment and disharmony. Thinking high of him she has indeed got unified in the marriage bond that is sacred and pious by nature but when she experiences the bitter truth of marriage in patriarchy, she feels troubled and psychologically disappointed and intends to seek for an outlet from the very marriage. Despite her efforts to come out of the oppressive marriage bond, she ultimately remains in the similar bond again even after the death of Mr. Casaubon. As being a woman she cannot live alone in the male-dominated society which finally enforces her to join Will Ladislaw and keep up with the demand and want of society. Eliot through Dorothea has thus clearly presented the plight of women and irony of marriage in patriarchy.

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## I. Women's Plight in Victorian Age

### General Background

George Eliot, a novelist, editor, translator, short story writer and poet was born in Mary Anne Evans on November 22, 1819 at Asbury Park in Warwickshire. The young Evans was obviously intelligent, and due to her father's important role on the estate, she was allowed access to the library of Asbury Hall, which greatly aided her education and breadth of learning. Her classical education left its mark; Christopher Stray has observed that "George Eliot's novels draw heavily on Greek literature (only one of her books can be printed without the use of a Greek font), and her themes are often influenced by Greek tragedy". Her frequent visits also allowed her to contrast the wealth in which the local landowner lived with the lives of the often much poorer people on the estate, and different lives lived in parallel would reappear in many of her works. The other important early influence in her life was religion. She was brought up within a narrow Anglican family, but at that time the Midlands was an area with many religious dissenters, and those beliefs formed part of her education. She boarded at schools in Attleborough, Nuneaton and Coventry. At the second she was taught by the evangelical Maria Lewis—to whom her earliest surviving letters are addressed—and at the Coventry school she received instruction from Baptist sisters.

In 1836 her mother died and Evans returned home to act as housekeeper, but she continued her education with a private tutor and advice from Maria Lewis. When she was 21, her brother Isaac married and took over the family home, so Evans and her father moved to Foresthill near Coventry. The closeness to Coventry society brought new influences, most notably those of Charles and Cara Bray. Charles Bray had become rich as a ribbon manufacturer and had used his wealth in building schools and other philanthropic causes. He was a freethinker in religious matters, a

progressive in politics, and his home, Roseville, was a heaven for people who held and debated radical views. The people whom the young woman met at the Brays' house included Robert Owen, Herbert Spencer, Harriet Martineau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Through this society, Evans was introduced to more liberal theologies, many of which cast doubt on the supernatural elements of Biblical stories, and she stopped going to church. This caused a rift between herself and her family, with her father threatening to throw her out, although that did not happen. Instead, she respectably attended church and continued to keep house for him until his death in 1857.

George Eliot began her literary career as a translator. She first translated the German theologian David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* into *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (1846). Her second foray in this field was her translation of Ludwig Forer's *Das Wesen Chrysanthemum* as *The Essence of Christianity* (1854). His Philosophy influenced both her personal morality and her narrative methodology: In June 1846, Eliot started writing a series of articles for Bray's radical periodical, the *Coventry Herald* which brought her into contact with John Chapman who bought the *Westminster Review* in 1851 and appointed Eliot as its (anonymous) editor while he remained the public face of the periodical. The magazine which addressed issues such as education and women's rights, suited her interests and talents, and increased her range of friends including her long-term partner, George Henry Lewes. In addition to editing numerous issues, she contributed a number of very fine essays and reviews.

While writing fiction, Lewes, himself a writer and editor, was the perfect partner; throughout his life, he acted as her literary agent and negotiated. All contracts with publishers. The first published fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), was

compiled version of three tales that appeared anonymously in periodicals. When they were reprinted as *Scenes of Clerical Life*. A signature is needed to be attached and "George" was chosen as a homage to the woman writer she most admired, *George Sand*. *Scenes of clerical life* was well received and encouraged her to write her first full-length novel, which also drew closely on her memories of her early life in Warwickshire. *Adam Bede* (1859), set at the time of the Methodist revival, was sensationally popular with library readers, although its success brought with it an unexpected problem, in that authorship was attributed to a certain. Joseph Liggins, who chose not to deny authorship. The consequence was that George Eliot was "outed", and her work attracted, as a result, some hostile reviews. Then she wrote another novel, *The Lifted Veil* (1859), a tale of clairvoyance, usually for her, told autobiographically, may express some of her horror at the predicament of perceiving the animus against her.

*Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, a panoramic fictional account of the life of the English provinces before the Reform Bill, has always been considered Eliot's master piece. *Daniel Deronda* (1876) is her last novel. In addition to these novels, she published two volumes of verse and fictional work which is neither novel nor short story. She published *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868) and *The Legend of Juba and other Poems, Old and New* (1874) as poems and *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879) as her last fiction.

Eliot was one of the most highly regarded nineteenth century woman writers. Her work was highly acclaimed in her own life time, but went out of fashion towards the end of the Victorian period and only commenced on the road to critical recovery with the publication in 1948 of F.R. Levi's highly influential *The Great Tradition*, which placed Eliot in a tradition of novelists whose concerns are to eschew

complacent confusions of judgment but whose texts are distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness for life and a marked moral intensity. Eliot was a great formal artist, though some critics criticized her of not having this quality. Barbara Hardy, in her critical work *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study of Form* (1959), has said: "The novels of Eliot gratified the formal pleasure in balance and opposition and unity, and at the same time present its intellectual and moral analysis of men and society" (17). From this point, Eliot's critical industry has shown no signs of abating; whatever new fashion in literary theory arises, the richness of her texts never fails to offer opportunities for new readings. Barbara said: "In this world there are so many of these common coarse people who have not picturesque sentimental wretchedness ! Therefore let Art remind us of them [...]your common laborer, who gets his own bread, and eats it vulgarly but creditably with his own pocket-knife(23). Eliot is not generally considered a feminist but what she accomplished in her carrier unquestionably did much to enhance the status of women.

Aglow Brown views:

Eliot struggled to reconcile her senses of duty with a desire to avenge women wronged by society. Her themes reflect her life her ambivalent relationship to the feminism of her day, her focus on relationships of power between men and women, and her attempt to reconcile the traditional masculine and feminine modes of expression and spheres of influence. (53)

Eliot probably did more than anyone else to change the view that the novel could only be regarded as popular entertainment and to win recognition for this genre as a vehicle for the serious examination of ideas. Like other great novelists, she expanded both the range and the technical resources of the novel. Whereas previous novelist had, in

general, emphasized the external events in the lives of their characters, Eliot emphasized their thoughts and feelings. In her novels, her characters' psychological response to an event is almost always more significant than the event itself. The expansion of the subject matter of fiction often requires new techniques of novel writing; Eliot's examination of her characters' mind and emotions is frequently presented through elaborate patterns of imagery which allow her to express the subtleties and complexities of their emotional and ethical dilemmas.

*Middlemarch* is the novel written on the issues of marriage where one goes through different couples and finds that matrimonial feelings serve as both as a blessing and curse. Raising the issue of marriage, Eliot has ironized male for their undoing of marriage. The novel has shown that women play important role for the happy marriage.

In the novel central character Dorothea marries with fatherly figure, Casaubon, to fulfill her strong desire to devote her life to such a personality who is devoted to the social service, especially the service to poor and can teach her Hebrew if needed to make her enlightened. But the results she gets is disgusting. Mr. Casaubon is limited writing a book which is useless to the society. Likewise Dr. Lydgate marries Rosamond who lives in Fantasy and fantasizes to live romantic life. But Dr. Lydgate doesn't have much money so that he can afford to make their lives fantastic. Moreover he never concentrates on earning money and making this married life happy. Rather he is absorbed in his research on a kind of fever and in a free service to poor people. He, even, doesn't take money given by Dorothea with the view of helping him posing the question of morality.

In another sub plot happy life of Mr. Balustrade and Mrs. Balustrade is broken when Mr. Balustrade's past immoral life is exposed. In another sub-plot though the

married life of Fred Vinci and Mary Garth is happy, it is Mary Garth who plays important role for the happy married life.

### **Critical Responses on *Middlemarch***

*Middlemarch* is a popular novel by George Eliot which has remained at the heart of critical interest and has received a storm of critical appraisals since its publication in 1872. *Middlemarch* is the novel which has made the greatest effort to bring the multifarious narratives observations to constitute a total representation into meaningful coherence and order. Many critics have researched *Middlemarch* through different aspects. Some tend to interpret it focusing on the social and psychological aspects whereas some have interpreted it from cultural, religious, moral and regional aspect.

Deep-rooted in the naturalist and realist vein which was the trend of Victorian Era, *Middlemarch* has attracted a number of responses from literary critics. One of those is Ashton Rosemary who has analyzed the novel from the feminist view point. She says that women fail due to the social condition which is uncongenial. They don't fail because of inherent failures of character. She says: "It might be pointed out to those who saw—and see—in *Middlemarch* chiefly the drama of woman's failure that the novel is concerned almost equally with the thwarting of a man's efforts by the 'hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions' in *Middlemarch*" (210).

In the *Middlemarch* George Eliot also has shown the subordinate position of individuality in relation to the society. B.R. Mallik analyzes *The Middlemarch* from the view point of individual in relation to society:

For in *Middlemarch* George Eliot is investigating human aspirations, in particular the aspirations to serve and to be good under two aspects; there is the part played in their realization by the individual human

being himself, with all his frailties his imperfect self knowledge and his will-power, and there are the limits set by the society in which he is born. (50)

This answer shows that the novel presents the individual beings who are headed towards social service and to be good, though there are barriers on the path they have taken. The society has limited them by imposing social norms and values upon them. At the same time the individual being himself is not perfect.

Another critic Simon Dentith finds mixed elements such as realism and the will to knowledge in *Middlemarch*. She says that it is no less than an attempt at a total representation of a provincial town but also in its intellectual range. She writes:

*Middlemarch* is the novel in which George Eliot makes the greatest effort to bring the multifarious narratives and observations which might constitute a 'total representation' into meaningful coherence and order. The book is a massive effort of understanding and of the will to knowledge it also bears continuous witness to the pains of that effort. This chapter is devoted to some of the implications of George Eliot's attempt to comprehend and make sense of English society at an exemplary moment of transition. (81)

In fact the novel is set in the period of transition time. When Reformation Bill had been passed. And the novel shows the life of Midland along with the will for knowledge of two major characters. Simon Dentith says: "*Middlemarch* is precisely addressed to the possibilities of 'enlightenment' and real progress (based on scientific knowledge) in a world substantially hostile to them" (88-9). Another critic Joan Bennett comments focusing upon regionalism. According to Joan Bennet, George Eliot, exploiting her local attachment and knowledge, has studied and interpreted the

individual lives with the life of a community. George Eliot's *Middlemarch* stands as one of the best novels among English fictions and one of the greatest works of art by George Eliot. It has attracted varieties of criticism and opinions. So, it is open to multiplicity of interpretations. The raw material for any kind of interpretation is the language of the text. The language can be twisted to focus on some particular points so that numerous interpretations to a text could be offered. Therefore, the researcher is going to interpret the novel from the perspective of feminist irony which is also the dominant pattern of the text.

## **II. Socio Political Perspective**

The term 'female' since the inauguration of human civilization has reserved its validity and conception as a biological contrast to male 'sex'. Indeed the natural biological contrast pervades each individual sex with distinctive features, physical qualities and assertions that are assumed to be essential and vital to sustain the true nature of human evolution and civilization. In fact the sex is the natural creation. Some social and cultural variations lie in terms of their behavior, manners, food habit, education and the attitude of society towards them. However, these discrepancies are apparently based on society. This is how some biased definitions, along with physical assertions are attached to each sex and they are bound to get identified with asymmetrical, hierarchical socio-cultural notions called 'gender'. Nature based female and male relation turns into society based women and men's feminine and masculine relation. The very relation exists as a hierarchical power relation where men dominate women in every social, economic, cultural and religious milieu of human life. The prejudice sustains itself in the form of male domination against female subordination through ideological practices. The patriarchy nurtures the gender based inequalities that present men superior to women and men more powerful than women.

Feminism is a divergent collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies, extensively motivated by or pertaining the bitter and sweet experiences of women. Most feminists are especially concerned with social, political, religious, racial and economic inequality between women and men and some have argued that gendered and sexed identities, such as "woman" and "man", are socially constructed. Feminists differ over the sources of inequality, the ways to attain equality and the extent to which gender and sexual identities should be questioned and

critiqued. Variations in the issues of feminists are because of their distinct belonging and upbringing to and in diverse cultures and societies.

Feminism generally is a theoretical discourse advocating women's rights based on belief in the equality of the sexes. It is a doctrine redefining women's activities and goals from a women-centered point of view and refusing to accept the cult of masculine chauvinism and superiority that reduces women to a sex object, a second sex, a submissive other. It seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex, and defend equal rights for women in a political, economic, psychological, personal and esthetic sense.

Though feminism became a dominant force in the literary studies only late in the 1960s, it had its origin from two centuries earlier by the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), which is considered to be the first formal enhancement of feminist writing though many others tried their hands before her too. Wollstonecraft in this book, advocates for the political and social rights of women and argues that society never can retain women only in the role of convenient domestic slaves and alluring mistresses by denying their economic independence and encouraging them to be docile and attentive to their looks to the exclusion of all else.

The feminist revolutionary spirit implanted by Wollstonecraft, however, could not accelerate so speedily for more than coming one century in the copy *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) by Margaret Fuller and *The Subjection of Women* (1869), by John Stuart Mill were only the two major works on feminism in the whole nineteenth century.

Virginia Woolf, by writing *A Room Of One's Own* (1929), and Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* (1949), contributed greatly for the worldwide emergence of

feminism in the first half of the twentieth century. Woolf focuses on situation of women authors throughout the history and their cultural, economic and educational disabilities within the patriarchal society which had prevented them from realizing their creative possibilities. The feminist trend of her time was concerned for absolute equality and the reassurance of differences between the sexes. But Woolf voiced for radical change as women's freedom and for their suppressed values affecting the concept of power, family and social life that had shaped by men in the past. Beauvoir on the other hand, says, "Femininity is cultural construct. One isn't born a woman, one becomes one" (209). The role of women in society is cultural construct because female infants do not know what they are: they are just like clay and it is the society which shapes them as females.

In patriarchy women have in general been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men, a position comparable in many respects with that of racial minorities in spite of the fact that women constitute numerically at least half of the human race. Further, this secondary standing is not imposed of necessity by natural feminine characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of educational and social tradition under the purposeful control of men. Women, in general, have failed to occupy places of dignity with free and independent existence to associate with men on a plane of intellectual and professional equality. This condition has not only limited their achievement in many fields but also given rise to pervasive social evils that have had a particularly vitiating effect on the sexual relations between men and women.

Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969) emphasizes that women should be given power to develop their personalities, economic status and literary career. She says "The essence of politics is power" (205). She claims that patriarchy is the main cause

of women's suppression and it makes them inferior. Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male. Power is exerted directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life, to constrain women.

In this way Shulamith Firestone proposed a world dichotomized by biology: male and female, where women are the unpaid means to social production of offspring. And males are the owners of the labor market; females are no more than the workers to the reproductive system. Oppression on women is due to the productive functions of a historical act, and the emancipation of women depends on the escape from the biological destiny. Firestone denied the emotional attachment of parents with their children, and spoke for undoing family unit. Freedman further demonstrates her: "Firestone maintains, to the dissolution of the family unit, with children over a period of time. Children would develop no special bonds with their 'parents' but would instead form love ties with people to their own choosing, whatever their age and sex"(70). Her revolutionary modification of familial structure throws doubt on the traditional belief in familial unity and solidarity.

Thus, feminist criticism is a politically powerful tool whose main task is to make the patriarchal society realize their rigid rules and regulations and to make women conscious of the age in order to wipe out gender discrimination so that women can take free breath as men do in society. Her approach is concerned with the study of social, institutional and personal power relations between the sexes because in patriarchal society the male is the overall and female is kept under male power and dominance.

Elaine Showalter invented the term "Gynocritics" to describe a study of women as writers, in which women are invited to speak for themselves whatever situation they are in. She divided women feminist critics into two groups. The first is

the ideological which is concerned with the feminist as the reader. It offers feminist readings of texts which consider the images and stereotypes of women in literature. The second mode is the study of women as writers. It considers history, style, themes, genres and structures of writings by women.

In *A Literature of Their Own* (1986) she says that like male writers female writers too have a tradition of their own. She examines British women novelists since the Bronte sisters from the point of view of women's experience. She divides the female into three phases. The first phase, the feminine, was from 1840 to 1880. In this stage women were so curious that they imitated the masculine mode because it was their first attempt and they had tried to perform through feminine concerns. The second, the feminist phase, lasted until 1920. It was a challenging period for women who were required to protect against male cruelty. The third that begins from 1920 is the female phase. In this period developing the idea of female writing and female experience of self-discovery, female writers showed more consciousness towards their own sex. According to her, though there is a profound difference between women's writing and men's, the female tradition is overlooked and undervalued by male critics.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) is another brilliantly written massive book in historical study of feminism which stresses especially the psychodynamics' of women writers in the nineteenth century. M.H. Abrams views:

The 'anxiety of authorship' that resulted from the stereotype that literary creativity is an exclusively male prerogative, effected in women writers a psychological duplicity that projected monstrous counter figure to the heroine [ . . . ]; such a figure is usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. (236)

Gilbert and Gubar's main argument is that artistic creativity of that nineteenth century tradition which is perceived basically as a male quality, is in fact patriarchal superimposition upon the women writers who are imprisoned within it. In the image of 'Divine Creator' the male author fathers his text. But taking the same masculine cosmic author as their model, women end up copying or identifying with the dominant literary images of female writers first to struggle against the effect of socialization that becomes struggle against men's oppressive reading of women. But they further argue that the women can begin such struggle only by actively seeking a female precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal authority is possible.

According to the above held discussion, we can divide the development of whole feminist literary criticism into three distinct phases. The first phase was centered on the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in classic and popular male literature, and the exclusion of women from literary history. The second phase dawned the discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose historical and thematic, as well as artistic importance, had been obscured by the patriarchal values that dominate the culture. Hundreds of lost women writers were rediscovered, and territory of the female imagination and the structures of the female plot were constructed in this phase. And, the third phase of feminist criticism demanded a radical rethinking of the conceptual ground of literary study, a revision of the accepted theoretical assumptions about reading and writing that have been based entirely on male literary experiences.

Influenced by a great variety of theoretical emergencies, the feminism presently has been a broad concept which covers a broader scope and includes

different aspects of humanity despite its focus on the entire issues of women. It, now, no more remains a unitary theory or procedure.

In 1970s and 80s, numerous black women writers rose to the literary and critical forum and started voicing out their agonies as marginalized, doubly oppressed in their works. Black feminists have indeed challenged white women's ability and Eurocentric and essentialist nature of some feminists. Bell hooks' *Ain't la Woman*(1981) relates the history of black women in the United States and their relationship to feminism. Hooks has argued that the rape and brutal assaults on black women during the period of slavery in the United States led to a devaluation of black womanhood that permeated the psyches of all Americans. Even now the US society perceives and represents black women as fallen women, whores and prostitutes that racism has taken precedence over sexism which is evident in the behavior of white women who turn their deaf ear to severe assaults upon black women.

Majority of black feminists yearn to be counted as men and share the bounties of the dominant society such as equal wages, child care and other accepted social rights while black women have been marginalized within a paradigm in which they are ignored, romanticized or ghettoized. Although the black feminists were as conscious of the problems of women as white feminists, their situation remained the same. Being black and women they were doubly suppressed. They were victimized by blacks as well as the white society. The black female experience is characterized by the interlocking oppressors of race, class and gender. These oppressors are interwoven into social structures and work together to define the history of the lives of black women of color.

Various authors argue that historically black women have been stereotyped as sex objects and breeders. Black women's personal growth has been impeded by the

continuing myths of the black matriarchy, a myth occurring black women of emasculating both black and white men. Black women have been stereotyped by both black and white as the 'bad' women as well. The white women did oppress as sexual temptress of white man and prostitutes. These stereotypes and myth have helped control black women's characters in the society. Right from the initiation of the slavery system, black women have always been exploited as the object of white male sexual assault. While men took pride in seducing black women. They often became the victim of rape, for sexism of white male was socially legitimized. bell hooks says: "Rape was a method used to terrorize, dehumanize and [...] to trip the female slave of dignity" (*Ain't la Women* 36). Black men could no longer protect them since they themselves were in dehumanized situation.

Thus under white domination a black man finds that his male ego is wounded. He starts his ceaseless cruelty on his woman finding no other role model than that of white man. Indeed both white women and black men act as oppressors. White women may be victimized by sexism but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black people. Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism energizes them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black women. But Black women have no such "others" upon whom they could act as oppressors. It was the long term silence of the oppressed and the continual revolution of black womanhood that paved a way towards Black Feminism. Besides the sexual violence and cultural stereotyping black women faced, several writers made it clear that women of color have been excluded from the women's movement.

The text *Middlemarch* is intended to be seen from the perspective of feminist irony that pervades throughout it. Irony means when incidence happens beyond expectation, that is the irony. Women are concerned to diverse expectations that they

tend to usually have before getting unified in the marriage bond. Irony is always tormenting and heartrending since people are badly affected and terribly shocked when anything happens just opposite their expectation. One of the British critics Rene Brown says in regard the irony of life: "Life is ever compromising as things never happen as people expect to. Human beings are terribly shocked and their hopes and aspirations get shattered in very subtle manner"(23). She has clearly made it that people do not meet the expectation in reality though they often attempt to achieve. Whatever happens is hardly expected and hoped. Everything is coincidental. Nobody can go ahead the time. So many ironies really take place in human abject life.

Feminism as entirely focuses on the equality and independence of women from diverse boundaries created in human society by males. Irony of the women's hopes and aspirations is the matter of study and concentration as it needs elaborating in such a manner that very thing regarding the females who are deprived of their fundamental rights in the male world gets pretty clear. When women are born, they are imposed on different kinds of cultural norms and values that are in order to dominate and exploit them. But they do not understand since they are not grown up mentally and physically. They really believe what male figures like father tell them to and do everything accordingly. They are trained in such a way that they do not question. Rather they take everything for granted. In fact this blind faith on male ideology ultimately leads them to get exploited. However, they cannot oppose directly. Rather they indirectly revolt and resist since they are tied in different kinds of relationships.

Gender irony is of the nature that women expect a lot from established institutions which are more or less in the favor of males such as marriage, family, and even cohabitation. Whatever the consequences may be every member of society sooner or latter joins such institutions. But irony lies in the fact that women get

eventually victimized in every institution since values and norms are created by males in biased and unfair manner. In regard to family life Susan Kher an Indian woman feminist says: “Family is built up with common consent that each member will be equally powerful and supreme with the hope that it will last longer and be stronger”(21). But the hope is shattered as soon as one feels that s/he is dominated and victimized in the name of relationships. Most probably women members of most of the families are exploited and dominated since they have been made economically and socially inferior to males. They are trained in such a way right from their birth that they are forced to depend on males into their life journey. Here it gets pretty clear that women are not weak but they are made weaker in society.

Similarly their position in the marriage bond is most often of a puppet which is played with by its master as he prefers. Women who are naturally and biologically far superior to men become bound to depend on males in many ways. They indeed expect that their position will be secure and safe once they enter into marriage institution. They do not see bright future any more outside marriage. They take this marriage very much pious and sacred and want to stay in it as soon as possible. But after their entrance into it they come to know how their expectations get shattered and broken into pieces since such hopes are very fragile in patriarchy. Regina Barreca in her book *Marriage and its Irony* argues:

Marriage is established on the common approval of both bride and bridegroom who are necessarily expecting to join each other with the hope that the demands of their youth as well as wants of society will be met in course of time but every thing turns opposite and the ocean of sorrow will spring out of the so-called fair and holy marriage and a rift

will created which ultimately ruins the filtered desires and pious expectations. (20)

Hence Barreca highlights the fact that marriage is expected to bring about happiness and pleasure in the life of both bride and groom but naturally and practically that hardly happens. Rather it brings about the world of discontentment and dependence. Most often the relationships between husband and wife is not as expected before marriage. Rather it comes to be that of master and servant in many cases since husbands impose their views whether they are right or wrong on women and furthermore force to accept and assimilate willingly or unwillingly. It is the male nature that he feels superior to woman and wants to establish his supremacy at any cost. This imbalance in long-lasting marriage institution brings about emotional break and clash in the marriage partners' life and they get compelled to live away from each other. But women again do not feel safe in the biased patriarchy and unwillingly thinks of getting unified in the conjugal bond as she takes it her need and demand of society. Thus women are compelled to live the life of dependence and puppets even if they are naturally equal to men in many aspects and furthermore superior to men in some sensitive aspects that is to say they can bear children as well as they have a lot of patience and tolerance. In fact this is the irony of female life as well as of marriage.

Regina Barreca argues in her introduction to *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, "the inability of the critical tradition to deal with comedy by women rather than the identity of women to produce comedy that accounts for the absence of critical material on the subject" (20). Elaborating upon Annette Kolodny's influential argument that reading is a gendered activity, Barreca contends that traditional definitions of female gender is that women are docile, tender, emotional, fragile, tolerant, dependent, less rational but more sentimental" are inadequate in

assessing women's capacity and their potentials" (8). In fact they are much more capable and courageous but their bravery and rationality depend on the bringing up and culture in which they are brought up. Motivated by aggression against culturally imposed restraints, women tend to culminate not in the reintegration of the patriarchal community by means of daughterly marriage, the renewal of the status quo through the progeny of the privileged but in the de-centering, dislocating, and de-establishing of cultural authority. It is this disruptive aspect of women.

Although Barreca's own discussion focuses with some intensity on feminist disruptions of the male-identified definition of gender, others in her collection convincingly demonstrate that the subversive aspects of female potentials extend beyond manipulations of conventions. In fact women writers in diverse periods have strongly opposed the male ideology and their concepts regarding women's potentials and their positions. They have attempted their level best to subvert the gender hierarchy that is based on cultural definitions and male ideology. Feminists in different time periods have appeared and advocated for the equal rights and positions but the efforts could not bring results as such they intended to. Theoretically they subverted the hierarchy but in fact tenets are still in the practice and women are bound to go accordingly.

*Middlemarch* the novel inscribed in the Victorian time draws a picture of females who are forced to join marriage institution so that they can live the life of security and safety. But their wishes and longings eventually get shattered due to the male chauvinist nature of the society and they just become dependent and puppets in the hands of their husbands who express their male ego in many ways and oppress them since they think that they are naturally superior and made to guide the woman sex. Dorothea the principal protagonist undergoes the similar ordeal of conjugal life

and bears different ups and downs in the bond of marriage. What she initially thinks and expects from Mr. Casaubon twice older than her remains just her dream. Her expectation gets shattered in such a way that she has never imagined to have life after marriage. This is really the feminist irony that happens in Dorothea's life which turns terribly desperate after her unification into the marriage bond. Moreover, her marriage with him becomes the source of misery, discontentment and disharmony. Thinking high of him she has indeed got unified in the marriage bond that is sacred and pious by nature but when she experiences the bitter truth of marriage in patriarchy, she feels troubled and psychologically disappointed and intends to seek for a soon outlet from the very marriage. An English critic, Robby Brown in his book *Marriage and its Values* argues:

Despite women's efforts to come out of oppressive marriage bond, they ultimately remain in the similar bond again even after the death of marriage partners. As being women they cannot live alone in the male-dominated society which finally enforces them to seek for alternatives for their safe existence in patriarchy. (14)

Hence it gets crystal clear that marriage does not guarantee fundamental rights of women. Rather it ruins all sorts of hopes and aspirations of basically women who often dream of having better life in the conjugal bond. Eliot through Dorothea has thus clearly presented the plight of women and irony of marriage in patriarchy.

As a matter of fact marriage is a pious and holy conciliation between two strangers for companionship of each other to continue the natural process of human race. In the marriage bond naturally both of the strangers need to respect each other's opinions and thoughts and should gradually develop relationship so that they get emotionally and sentimentally unified and their conjugal bond becomes stronger. But

it does not usually happen. Rather everything goes beyond and their utopian world of marriage gets dismantled. And so is the case of Dorothea as she has thought initially that she should marry Mr. Casaubon assuming that she will enjoy his companionship since she takes him an intellectual more than even herself. But every thing happens just opposite that she faces just oppression and domination. He simply imposes his dead and biased ideas on her and forces her to accept them. Any how he intends to establish his supremacy in the conjugal life which is all opposite Dorothea's expectation. This is in fact the irony of her life.

### III. Tussle in Sacredness of Marriage

*Middlemarch* is generally regarded as an antiheroic novel. Dorothea's failure to perform some recognizable deed and even more that of Lydgate, are seen as implicit arguments against the possibility of heroism in any grand sense and for a heroism of small measures, even of resignation. Of course the novel clearly does assert the impossibility of heroism for a woman like Dorothea, but it just as clearly does not extend that claim to men. Dorothea's tragedy is one of opportunity denied; Lydgate is one of opportunity lost. Why it gets lost, however, has yet to be adequately addressed. Critics divide responsibility between Lydgate himself and the town of *Middlemarch*, the town regarded as culpable for its resistance to change, the man for his egotism as well as for his failure to apply his considerable analytic powers to his own situation.

The more interesting of recent approaches have it that Lydgate fails simply because he allows himself to become entangled with the concerns of the town, particularly through his marriage to Rosamond. An English critic, Rene Brown states:

The heroism that Lydgate desires so passionately assumes a form associated with a pair of figures whose influence on George Eliot has remained oddly unexplored. Lydgate understands heroism not simply as the doing of great deeds, but as the shaping of historical change in the direction of enlightenment. For George Eliot, as for her forebears, the hero is understood as an idealized image of the reforming intellectual. (34)

Within the cell of their marriage, Rosamond and Lydgate are unable to talk to each other about the way their life is unraveling. Dorothea, as a gesture of friendship to Lydgate, has come to try to help. Will's presence when she gets there, however, both

defer and intensify the encounter. His anger shatters Rosamond with humiliation, while in the moment when it looks as though Will's affections are variable, Dorothea understands the depth of her love for him. she retreats overnight, but, true to her, her erotic despair comes as a spiritual struggle, and its outcome is a decision to fulfill her interrupted mission to see and save Rosamond. At their second meeting, Dorothea feels that she is speaking from out the heart of her own trial to Rosamond's, while for Rosamond this strange unexpected manifestation of feeling in a woman whom she has approached with a shrinking aversion and dread, as one who must necessarily have a jealous hatred towards her, makes her soul totter all the more with a sense that she has been walking in an unknown world which has just broken upon her.

Disarmed by Dorothea's generous intensity, Rosamond confesses urged by a necessity to free herself from something that oppresses her as if it were blood-guiltiness. She tells Dorothea that she has mistaken the meaning of the scene with will, that in fact she, not Rosamond, is the woman he loves. Dorothea is thus freed to follow her affection; the chastened Rosamond returns meekly to her husband. Once again a woman with a mission enters into an overwhelming intimacy with a fallen woman and comes out of it with a man in her eagerness to save Rosamond from a loveless marriage, Dorothea confesses as well. In speaking brokenly of the pain of her own loveless marriage, she shares Rosamond's trial. As the two women, strangers to each other, come even closer, Rosamond is moved to consummate the relationship by handing over Will.

Because of *Middlemarch's* fidelity to the concept of individualism and its reliance on the concept of free agency to provide its moral grounding, the very choices that mark Dorothea as virtuous cause her to pass from one narrative and its discourse into another. Since to remain virtuous after she becomes a wife means that

she must shrink to fit the little world of women; Dorothea diminishes into subordination to her man. as she moves from the nineteenth-century capitalist narrative of free individualism to Eliot's particular narrative of domesticity; Dorothea is reconstructed from a subject who makes significant choices in love to a woman who finds her significance as the object of another's love. This journey suggests that a woman's claiming of the subject position in love ironically initiates her entrance into a relation with man in which she is inevitably made the love object. Because she loses subjectivity in relation to a specific man, when readers attempt to recover Dorothea as subject, to examine her choices and acts, they must turn the critical gaze to Will Ladislaw. Consequently, questions about the novel's representation of Dorothea's choice and will, entail questions about her choice of Will. In this regard, working from the nineteenth-century understanding of Shakespeare as unusually sympathetic to women, Marianne Novy stresses: "Eliot's readings of the plays focus on women's friendship and the active role of women in love affairs". She concludes that "Reading Shakespeare from a woman's viewpoint, emphasizing qualifies in him and in his characters that crossed gender boundaries, Eliot reimagined a literary tradition that she could claim as her own".

Eliot unproblematically experiences transgression of gender norms, it seems rather unfair that Dorothea diminishes into heroine as the price of acting heroically. But here it seems that Eliot treats her heroine equitably, for she presents Dorothea's final enclosure within Victorian marriage conventions through intertextualization to reflect her entrapment by narrative conventions. Dorothea crosses border into the domestic plot because within the strictures of Eliot's realism that is the only place Eliot's Shakespearean fantasies can lead.

*Middlemarch* is about Dorothea, a young, idealist woman, born to a good family with a modest fortune of her own. She is a prime catch on the wife market—money, family name, good looks. Her parents are deceased and her friends and uncle seek to pair her up with a local baron as the ideal mate. But Dorothea, bookish, religious and dreamy, has other ideas. She chooses, instead, a superannuated cleric who finally decides to marry as he feels mortality and ill health upon him. Casaubon, the vicar of a nearby rural church is a good match except he is old, ugly and what the heck he is doing marrying such a young beauty. But Dorothea, who's imagining a sort of superior father figure who could teach her even Hebrew, if she wished it, wakes up to far less than a reality of marital bliss. The problem of *Middlemarch* lies at the focal level that is to say Dorothea a female hero who expected a lot from her husband, Mr. Casaubon eventually faces the disastrous situation created by males in patriarchy and realizes the fact that life of women in male-dominated society is much dependent and uncertain. Furthermore she concludes that women are socially forced to abandon their longings and wishes for the sake of male partners in the conjugal life.

Dorothea indeed faces the very plight when she gets unified in the marriage bond with Mr. Casaubon whom she took the source of knowledge and morals before marriage. Her expected dream is shattered into pieces and then she remodels her concept about life and marriage. And there is an added complication created but unworthy husband that he has dire consequences for the young Dorothea. The subsequent examination of marriage as a partnership in hell is written with stunning modernity. Eliot not only creates the disastrous marriage of Dorothea to Casaubon, but also pairs, as a comparison, Lydgate, a doctor and his frivolous, vain, uncaring wife. The relationship of marriage to society is never more well drawn, but the internal suffering of people trapped in loveless marriage is written with sympathy and

cunning insight. Marriage is the pious and sacred institution which needs common understanding and respect for both of spouses who have been committed to living and dying together. But things go beyond the expectations of marriage and wishes of female characters get dismantled in such a way that marriage turns a burdensome institution to them. Thus irony of marriage is crystal clear in patriarchy.

Eliot's *Middlemarch* traces a vast panorama of life in a provincial Midlands town. At the story's centre stands the intellectual and idealistic Dorothea Brooke a character who in many ways resembles Eliot herself. But the very qualities that set Dorothea apart from the materialistic, mean-spirited society around her also lead her into a disastrous marriage with a man she mistakes for her soul mate. In a parallel story, young doctor Tertius Lydgate, who is equally idealistic, falls in love with the pretty but vain and superficial Rosamond Vincy, whom he marries to his ruin. Among the most impressive achievements of Victorian literature is the large-scale social-anatomy novel, whose main features are a panoramic sweep, from the rich and patrician to the poor and obscure, a set of interwoven plots which connect a variety of socially diverse figures, a keen interest in the subtleties and shifting balances of class relations, a concern with social history, especially the collision between forces of change and of conservatism, and an omniscient narration which combines a critically evaluative overview with intensive focus on selected individual lives.

The central character Dorothea is very idealistic in the initial phase of her life and advocates in the favor of simple and studious life. Her focus on learning shows her priority to education and high thought. Despite being a young lady she does not put clothes and jewels commonly worn by women in the patriarchic society. This unusualness makes her foreground the focal character in *Middlemarch*. Dorothea's level of thinking is extraordinary and marvelous. She is much spiritually revolutionary

in the sense that she ignores the customs extant in the society and paves her way of life herself and moves on it:

She could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in guimp and artificial protrusions of drapery. Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world. Certainly such elements in the character of a marriageable girl tended to interfere with her lot, and hinder it from being decided according to custom, by good looks, vanity, and merely canine affection. (6)

Dorothea's lofty conception heightens her position in the society guided by different customs and vain beliefs. There are certain criteria for a marriageable girl and she is intended to have possessed all those. But Dorothea as peculiar marriageable girl goes beyond such requirements. Rather she attempts her distinct position keeping her away from temptation of patriarchy. Dorothea is very eager to know the truths of life and retains very child like ideas about marriage. In the course of time she comes in the touch of Mr. Casaubon and gets attracted to him not because he is very much similar to her by age but because she finds him having high conception and lofty thought of life:

Dorothea colored with pleasure, and looked up gratefully to the speaker. Here was a man who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion; nay, who could illuminate principle with the widest knowledge: a man whose learning almost amounted to a proof of whatever he believed! (18)

It gets pretty clear that Dorothea's inclination towards Mr. Casaubon is due to his comprehension of higher eternal life and his capacity to illuminate the principle of

life. Her expectation from probable husband is to understand her spiritual feelings and her inward desires. She does not think and even does not want to marry a man with lots of material property. Her thought and perspective are indeed commendable and appreciative. Similarly Mr. Casaubon gets surprised when he sees an offer of marriage by a young beautiful lady as he has never thought before that such a lady would ever make an offer of marriage to such a dried bookworm towards fifty. His belief in the incompatibility between them is reasonable and a kind of surprise as well. He thinks from the perspective of a male in the male-dominated society where marriage is based on the physical and material grounds. On the other hand Dorothea thinks that Mr. Casaubon is the right person who thinks about the fundamental rights of women differently from other male figures of the time. Her search in the life partner is concerned with the spiritual and intellectual qualities. Eliot highlights her thought:

The thing which seemed to her best, she wanted to justify by the completest knowledge; and not to live in a pretended admission of rules which were never acted on. Into this soul-hunger as yet all her youthful passion was poured; the union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path. (23)

As an ideal lady, Dorothea is thirsty of knowledge and takes knowledge all in all. Her quest of life seems to have been the person having a high level of thought and distinct attitude towards human life. Comparatively she considers herself less knowledgeable than Mr. Casaubon since she sees in him whatever she does not find in her. She takes him a right and appropriate guide to take her along a grand path. This sort of evaluation by Dorothea displays the fact that she is fascinated to him a lot. The

nineteenth century society was very much male-dominated and women were taken as the objects of attraction and unmarried males made numerous efforts to convince ladies for marriage when they found them beautiful and wealthy. Dorothea is beautiful and marriageable and she has got a lot of property as well which attract people like Sir James Chettam. He frequently visits Dorothea since he is much interested in her. He is as a suitor to Dorothea and makes efforts to create conducive environment for marriage with Dorothea. But Dorothea does not have any concern with him. Rather she finds him inappropriate to her for marriage. She feels disappointed due to his readiness:

Meanwhile that little disappointment made her delight more in Sir James Chettam's readiness to set on foot the desired improvements . He came much oftener than Mr. Casaubon, and Dorothea ceased to find him disagreeable since he showed himself so entirely in earnest; for he had already entered with much practical ability into Lovegood's estimates, and was charmingly docile. She proposed to build a couple of cottages, and transfer two families from their old cabins, which could then be pulled down, so that new ones could be built on the old sites. (27-8)

Despite her apathy towards Sir James Chettam, she does not react negatively to him which is because his earnest behavior and practical ability into Lovegood's estimates. Hence it gets crystal clear that Dorothea is considerate and has got capacity to judge the situation of people. Dorothea's ideal aspect is religious and spiritual and this is why she looks at everything compassionately and unbiased. An English critic, Robin Smith of the twentieth century exposes Dorothea in this way:

In the opening scene of *Middlemarch*, Dorothea, the idealistic heroine, is shown as disingenuous in her high-minded disregard of her mother's jewels. Despite herself or, more accurately, her self-conception, she is attracted to the gems and then rationalizes her attraction by merging her delight in the colours with a mystic religious joy in effect denying to herself the impunity of her motives. (14)

Dorothea indeed undergoes dilemma and fluidity of her decision. What she does first contradicts with her later actions which is due to the lack of strong and healthy determination. However, she is an idealistic heroine in the sense that her inclination towards mysticism is so high that her rational aspect fails to overcome the former one. The above extract discloses Dorothea's inner psyche and behavioral aspect in very crystal manner. There was intolerable pressure of society and family on women. They were confined to the system of the contemporary society of Europe. Dorothea as a lady is not free to do something that she prefers. Rather she is guided and her personal affair is even dealt with by her relatives like Mr. Brook, her uncle. His perspective to look at the world is different from hers in the sense that Mr. Brook sees Sir James Chettam a suitable candidate for marriage with Dorothea whereas Dorothea has already discarded him and has chosen Mr. Casaubon as her future husband. Her decision regarding marriage is taken immature and inappropriate by her relatives. In this regard Eliot shows her uncle's inner desire:

My niece has chosen another suitor-has chosen him, you know. I have had nothing to do with it. I should have preferred Chettam; and I should have said Chettam was the man any girl would have chosen. But there is no accounting for these things. Your sex is capricious, you know. (45)

Hence Mr. Brook's male chauvinist nature gets reflected. He sees everything from his perspective and rather he is biased in the matter of gender issue. He sees drawbacks on the part of women. He thinks what males see and find commendable should be accepted by women as they are not as intellectual and capable as males. Here he attempts to impose his liking on his niece, Dorothea which is in fact unjust on the human ground.

There were certain factors to determine a lady's womanly qualities. To measure her whether she is with those features or not was the concern of the male figures. Hence Lydgate is fascinated by a woman and compares her with Miss Brook and finds the former better and more graceful than the latter one. In fact a woman is judged in the patriarchy on the basis of her physical beauty and charm. Furthermore, men see whether she can attract them or not. In this regard Eliot states:

Lydgate, in fact was already conscious of being fascinated by a woman strikingly different from Miss Brook: he did not in the least suppose that he had lost his balance and fallen in love but he had said of that particular woman, 'she is grace itself; she is perfectly lovely and accomplished. That is what a woman ought to be: she ought to produce the effect of exquisite music.' Plain women he regarded as he did the other severe facts of life, to be faced with philosophy and investigated by science. (95)

The demarcation Lydgate shows between the plain women and gracefully exquisite women associating the former ones with philosophy and science. What he says is the matter of bitter criticism since he discloses his ruling mentality to dominate the women sex. The condition he highlights for women that they should produce the effect of music is the expectation of men from women. Men do not want women to be

intellectual and philosophical. Rather they prefer graceful and perfectly lovely who could produce the exquisite music. In fact here Eliot has drawn the realistic scenario of her contemporary time to show the mean-spirited and biased males.

Eliot denies her heroines the same sort of success at transcending gender role she had enjoyed. Working against the idea that women's fiction should provide liberatory role models, both Austen and Blake praise Eliot for realistically depicting the possibilities open to most nineteenth century women and for refusing to set up as a model the extraordinary person at the expense of more compromised and less successful women. While feminist objections to Eliot do continue, defenses on the grounds of realism also continue to appear. According to these defenses, Eliot's tendency to resolve her heroines' life crises with marriage becomes fidelity to the truth of ordinary women's lives. Eliot's mouthpiece, Dorothea is depicted as such:

Yet Dorothea had no distinctly shapen grievance that she could state even to herself; and in the midst of her confused thought and passion, the mental act that was struggling forth into clearness was a self-accusing cry that her feeling of desolation was the fault of her own spiritual poverty. She had married the man of her choice, and with the advantage over most girls that she contemplated her marriage chiefly as the beginning of new duties: from the very first she had thought of Mr. Casaubon as having a mind so much above her own, that he must often be claimed by studies which she could not entirely share. (160)

As a matter of fact, Dorothea has seen a lot of intellectual potentialities in Mr. Casaubon and appreciates him much due to his high study and knowledge. She does not see as much as spiritual richness in her as she does in Mr. Casaubon. This has indeed been the matter of attraction in Mr. Casaubon. Her marriage with him has

delighted Dorothea and she feels much comfortable with her life partner. Her expectation from her husband that he must have had higher mind than her is completed when she is entangled in the marriage bond with Mr. Casaubon. But one thing that Dorothea has been ignoring the emotional aspect of her husband plays a vital role in strengthening the conjugal bond. She does not see the dark side of marriage with a man twice older than her. She is completely blind and feels delighted enough that her husband is highly studious person. After all, she does seem farsighted and speculative. Dorothea's conflicting state can be seen:

She was as blind to his inward troubles as he to hers; she had not yet learned those hidden conflicts in her husband which claim our pity. She had not yet listened patiently to his heart-beats, but only felt that her own was beating violently. In Mr. Casaubon's ear, Dorothea's voice gave loud emphatic iteration to those mere fancy, the illusion of exaggerated sensitiveness [...] and this cruel outward accuser was there in the shape of a wife- Nay, of a young bride, who, instead of observing his abundant pen scratches [...]with the uncritical awe of an elegant-minded canary-bird, seemed to present herself as a spy watching everything with a malign power of inference. (87)

Dorothea Brook is presented in such a way that she is neither critical nor rational. The above extract clarifies that she is very ignorant and never understands the innermost feelings of other as here she does not feel the heart-beats of Mr. Casaubon which adds to her blindness. Her sensitiveness is falsely exaggerated and emphasized. In fact that is fanciful and illusive. She thinks that she has got a lot of critical senses and has been capable enough of observing things so minutely but she is in illusion and lives less or more the life of a hypocrite. The situation turns opposite of Dorothea's expectation

when she finds her judgment made earlier wrong and hasty. She realizes that she committed a great blunder marrying Mr. Casaubon as she finds him somebody else beyond the person she expected and wanted. Here she feels deluded and criticizes herself. In this regard Eliot asserts:

To Dorothea's inexperienced sensitiveness, it seemed like a catastrophe, changing all prospects; and to Mr. Casaubon it was a new pain, he never having been on a wedding journey before, or found himself in that close union which was more of a subjection than he had been able to imagine, since this charming young bride not only obliged him to much consideration on her behalf (which he had sedulously given), but turned out to be capable of agitating him cruelly just where he most needed soothing. (168)

A sort of psychological tussle emerges between Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon when he gets agitated due to her capacity and sexual wants. In fact there is not physical compatibility between them. However, their relationship like the wall of sand has been established on the intellectual and ideal ground. When they face the bitter truth of conjugal life, they feel that both of them have committed a great mistake. The youth of Dorothea seeks for maximum strength and energy that Mr. Casaubon fails to provide her which makes the relationship much critical and serious. The age factor plays a very crucial role in the conjugal life. The marriage naturally turns unhappy when there is incompatibility between the spouses. Life is mysterious and people are much more mysterious than this life. What they are determined to doing once does not mean they do the same and have the similar attitude towards the very thing. After all changes are tangible in human life due to the fact that everything is in the flux. Dorothea an idealistic lady once committed to living her whole life with Mr.

Casaubon, seems a little disappointed when she finds oddity and lack of physical strength to fulfill her desire in Mr. Casaubon. They are psychological detachment between them. In fact the society does not accept the pair which is established on the ideal ground rather than on the real and natural one. The relationship of Mr. Casaubon and Dorothea is not intolerable to Will:

Will saw that she was offended, but this only gave an additional

impulse to the new irritation of his latent dislike towards Mr.

Casaubon. It was too intolerable that Dorothea should be worshipping

this husband: such weakness in a woman is pleasant to no man but the

husband in question. Mortals are easily tempted to pinch the life out of

their neighbor's buzzing glory, and think that such killing is no

murder. (172)

Will's inclination towards Dorothea and his concern about her is the matter of study here. Dorothea's marriage has been based on her ideals and moralities which are indeed not tangible and natural. This is why they cannot make their conjugal life much strong. There is not any compatibility on the natural grounds between them. Will as a young man does think of their relationship and sympathize with Dorothea much is very much probable. He sees lots of similarities between himself and Dorothea on the natural grounds and wants to have her even though she is already unified with Mr. Casaubon in a marriage bond. To turn jealous is also much agreeable since he does not think that Mr. Casaubon is any more suitable to the person he does love a lot. He gets surprised why she has chosen Mr. Casaubon as her life partner, blames the whole woman race regarding the hasty and unnatural decision that they make being tempted to the hypocritical and baseless things. He further states that the weakness that women have is not taken in the positive way by the males rather they

simply ignore it and never try to take notice of it. Women's devotion to their husbands is the foundation of trust but men do not find it any more pleasant. This is also a sort of irony of conjugal life. As a matter of fact conjugal life becomes strong and sustainable when there is reciprocal trust and understanding between wife and husband. But when any of them lacks the belief and devotion for other, it turns a source of misery and pain. In this regard Eliot says:

Marriage, which was to bring guidance into worthy and imperative occupation, had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman's oppressive liberty: it had not even filled her leisure with the ruminant joy of unchecked tenderness. Her blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colourless, narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-read books, and the ghostly stag in a pale fantastic world that seemed to be vanishing from the daylight. (227)

Hence everything is crystal clear that Dorothea expected her conjugal life would be delightful and praiseworthy. She would be more independent and feel emancipated in the company of Mr. Casaubon since she found him too much considerate and learned but her expectation takes an opposite mode and she gets entrapped in the net of oppression and feels morally imprisoned now. It is the irony of marriage in patriarchy. More or less the position of women in the marriage bond is fragile and uncertain since male ideologies are given a lot of priority due to the male dominated structure of society. In the oppressive environment Dorothea's every moment of conjugal life becomes intolerable and tormenting to her. She feels as if she were in the world of human imprisonment where she didn't feel delighted even in her leisure. Her dreamed life is badly destroyed here and she gets paralyzed in making further decisions.

Moreover she feels blocked on the middle of her life destination. This miserable condition that she faces is the matter of great contemplation as women of the contemporary time were more or less fated to face the same. Eliot has successfully drawn the picture of her time to show how women were victimized due to their hearty devotion and blind love for their husbands in the patriarchic society. A critic, Rachel Blau Duplessis in this concern states:

*Middlemarch's* conclusion is as characteristic of contradictions in how Victorian women writers transmit a cultural ideology that demands both heroic individualism and domesticity: "as a gendered subject in the nineteenth century, Dorothea has barely any realistic options in work or vocation, so her heroism lies in defining herself as a free agent, freely choosing the romance that nonetheless, in one form or another, is her fate. The female hero turns herself into a heroine; this is her last act as an individual agent. (14)

Duplessis seems to have stressed on the plight of female heroes in the Victorian Time how they were provided with roles by the writers. The cultural ideology of Victorian Time demanded both heroic individualism and domesticity. It shows the fact the women of time were doubly loaded with responsibilities: one as an individual and next as a housewife. To play both roles simultaneously requires lots of courage and strength that women should have had in order to meet the cultural ideology. If anyone failed in any of the appointed responsibilities she would be considered as a failure in her life. Thus the above study displays the concrete reality that women were oppressed and their feelings and attitudes were not taken notice of by the male figures who had created ideologies unfairly and biased. Dorothea is here as the representative of women of the time whose role reflects the tangible plight of women of then.

Women were taken as subordinates to the males in the contemporary time. Their role was instrumental. Thus their position was terribly affected by the roles provided to them in patriarchy. Dorothea though saw Mr. Casaubon much considerate and having distinct human qualities from other males does not seem different in the conjugal life as he does take Dorothea as a helpmate to him while conducting his job. He thinks that she will assist him a lot. Hence Eliot highlights his male chauvinist nature:

And when he had seen Dorothea he believed that he had found even more than he demanded: she might really be such a helpmate to him as would enable him to dispense with a hired secretary, an aid which Mr. Casaubon had never yet employed and had a suspicious dread of. (Mr. Casaubon was nervously conscious that he was expected to manifest a powerful mind.) providence, in its kindness, had supplied him with the wife he needed. A wife, a modest young lady, with the purely appreciative, unambitious abilities of her sex, is sure to think her husband's mind powerful. (231)

Mr. Casaubon's male chauvinist nature gets pretty clear in the above extract. He is here as the representative of the Victorian males. He takes his life Dorothea and thinks that he has been fortunate enough to have had such a hired secretary. It is the matter of bitter criticism how inhumanly and irrationally he judges the position of Dorothea that she is just as an employee to him. Hence everything is going on beyond Dorothea's expectation. If she had had any clue of his evil and oppressive nature, she would not have been unified with him in the so-called pious and holy marriage bond. But she saw him a lot of human potentialities and commendable notion. Along with this she took him more educated and considerate who could supple her knowledge in the course of their Conjugal life. She didn't think of him in the other way that had

been paved by the male-dominated society of the time. That is why a beautiful young lady got married to a man twice older than her and was determined to play the role of a good life partner. Her over-devoted nature and belief takes an antagonistic mode and ruins her expected life. Furthermore Mr. Casaubon takes Dorothea as a lady without any ambitions and purpose so serious. Hence he humiliates the female sex and finds it useless. He considers women as the matter of appreciation and source of entertainment. This biased attitude based on sex discrimination creates a rift between Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon who stand contrary to each other regarding the way they see the human world. He is more or less an opportunist in the sense that Dorothea has taken him a man having higher thought and the very belief he takes her weakness and attempts to get benefited from her innocence and ignorance about his true face. He does not speculate that mean-spirited thought will lead to mistrust and emotional detachment from her one day.

Sir James who initially made efforts to stop Dorothea from marrying Mr. Casaubon analyses the previous mistakes committed by Mr. Brook, the Dorothea's uncle when he finds their failure in their conjugal life. In fact he has always loved Dorothea and imagined good things to happen in her favor but he failed to stop her from marrying with Mr. Casaubon a man whom he has always discarded and seen incompatible for marriage with Dorothea. He expresses his thought regarding the past drawbacks on the part of Dorothea's relatives as such:

It was wicked to let a young girl blindly decide her fate in that way, without any effort to save her. Sir James had long ceased to have any regrets on his own account: his heart was satisfied with his engagement with Celia. But he had a chivalrous nature: his disregarded love had not turned to bitterness; its death had made sweet odours- floating

memories that clung with a consecrating effect to Dorothea. He could remain her brotherly friend, interpreting her actions with generous trustfulness. (236)

His interpretation about the marriage of Dorothea is just and rational. In one way it is reasonable that guardians are responsible for youths and they should not be left to make any decisions basically decision about marriage which is serious and long lasting matter. Rather guardians should think of whether the youths make right decisions. Along with this Sir James finds Dorothea over confident in her decision and knowledge a failure in her conjugal life. Sir James whose love was disregarded once by Dorothea is happy after getting unified in the marriage bond with Celia the sister of Dorothea. There is a great irony of marriage in patriarchy in the sense that Dorothea fails who thought Mr. Casaubon would be far better and more considerate and sensitive than Sir James and in contrary to her Sir James is happy with his marriage with Celia who was disappointed when Dorothea ignored him and his marriage proposal. However, Sir James does not take Dorothea otherwise as he still loves her as a brotherly friend. On this ground he does not seem selfish and opportunist. Moreover she feels sorry on the desolate and tasteless marriage of Dorothea. He blames Mr. Brook Dorothea's uncle that he freed her a lot in deciding about marriage alone.

Dorothea now realizes that her uncle just he wanted her not to marry Mr. Casaubon. She regrets that she herself wished her uncle not to invite Will Ladislaw. Furthermore Mr. Casaubon did dislike him. as a matter of fact she is sorry for all these mischievous acts and wants to restore her happiness by creating new world of reality with full hopes and energy which could help her feel live life with pleasure and ecstasy. After death of Mr. Casaubon she becomes totally destroyed and feels

alienated from the real world that she did feel somehow when she was in the company with Casaubon since there was also psychological detachment. Now onwards she prefers to be real not ideal as she has found idealistic life fully ruthless and tasteless.

Dorothea marries Ladislav, according to her account, because she loves him and he loves her. *Middlemarch* in this respect is a classic Victorian love story, with the woman giving her estate to marry the man she loves, and the man giving up his inheritance to gain the respect of his beloved. Ladislav attracts Dorothea precisely because he is morally flawed, an imperfect human being which provides her with her mission: to redeem him. It is her love for him and faith in him that make him a better human being, so that he can be worthy both of her and of her society. His is not an exalted mission; Ladislav in parliament is not going to be a heroic character aspiring to transform society. But he will be a sensible, moderate reformer.

As a matter of fact Will Ladislav has not been a pure person regarding his illicit relationship. His relationship with Rosamond is very much illicit before his marriage with Dorothea. Similarly Rosamond has been very much dishonest in her conjugal life. Her husband Lydgate a simple-minded person is deceived by Rosamond. Regarding Will's relationship with Rosamond Eliot states:

Now that she was alone in her drive, she heard the notes of the man's voice and the accompanying piano, which she had not noted much at the time, returning on her inward sense; and she found herself thinking with some wonder that Will Ladislav was passing his time with Mrs. Lydgate in her husband's absence. And then she could not help remembering that he had passed some time with her under like circumstances. (357)

The extract above is the observation of Dorothea and her analysis of Rosamond's character. It echoes the long drawn-out treatment of the failed marriage of the parallel couple Lydgate and Rosamond. Both marriages go from strong physical attraction to boring concern with domestic finance. While Dorothea's interest in such things adds to her characterization as admirably unselfish in contrast to Rosamond. Marriage is presented simply and, in the case of Will and Dorothea's love scene, concisely as a place where virtuous wives must support husbands' ambitions and worry about the bills. Furthermore the unhappy marriage between Lydgate and Rosamond gets reflected through Eliot's perception on their marriage life:

Rosamond had a gleam of returning cheerfulness when the house was freed from the threatening figure, and when all the disagreeable creditors were paid. But she was not joyous: her married life had fulfilled none of her hopes, and had been quite spoiled for her imagination. In this brief interval of calm, Lydgate, remembering that he had often been stormy in his hours of perturbation, and mindful of the pain Rosamond had had to bear, was carefully gentle towards her.

(618)

Rosamond's discontent in her marriage is due to the conditions of marriage itself, to its demand for self-suppression and tolerance, and not to the nature of her husband; but the easy conception of an unreal person having sentimental charm. Her hopes remain unfulfilled and rather get destroyed in the course of time. Thus their conjugal life turns disastrous and meaningless. The shock to Rosamond is terrible. It seems to her that no lot can be so cruelly hard to her to have married a man who has become the centre of infamous suspicions. In many cases it is inevitable that the shame is felt to be the worst part of crime; and it would require a great deal of disentangling

reflection, as such has never entered into Rosamond's life, for her in these moments to feel that her trouble is less than if her husband has been certainly known to have done something criminal. All the shame seems to be there. And she has innocently married this man with the belief that he and his family were a glory to her. But ultimately every hope gets ruined and she becomes a failure in marriage. The Lydgates' marriage is a failure because Rosamond does not understand the nature of marriage; she thinks her discontent is with her husband, whereas it is with the conditions of marriage itself and its demand for self-suppression and tolerance.

In contrary to Rosamond, Dorothea never makes that mistake. Even when she was most displeased with Casaubon, she did not rebel against marriage itself. There is no discussion of the suffrage, or any other overtly feminist subject, in *Middlemarch*. But the text is undeniably a challenge to modern feminist. In this regard, An English critic Bobby Warren states:

The idea that only in marriage can Dorothea find her personal happiness as well as her moral mission seems peculiarly Victorian. And so it is. For the Victorian even for Victorian feminists, marriage and family were the primary human relationships, so that champions of women's suffrage, university education, divorce reform, property rights, birth control, or any other feminist cause had to demonstrate that their proposals were compatible with marriage and family. Victorian families, recent scholarship has shown, were not nearly as oppressive or patriarchal as was once thought [...] that idea implied that men and women had distinctive natures and virtues which bound them together in a complex relationship of rights, duties, and, if they were fortunate, love. (55)

Warren's view regarding women of Victorian time seems very critical and observatory since he has attempted his best to picture women and their marital conditions. His study of Victorian marriages based on the common consent of male and female is no more oppressive. No doubt there are differences at the level of their thoughts and virtues. But it is the marriage that unifies them in a complex bond that finally turns as the knot of love and they feel responsible for happiness of each other. Dorothea the central figure of *Middlemarch* feels responsible for happiness of her family even when she gets reunified in marriage bond with Will Ladislaw and she takes marriage and union with Will as such:

She entertained no visions of their ever coming into nearer union, and yet she had taken no posture of renunciation. She had accepted her whole relation to Will very simply as part of her marriage sorrows, and would have thought it very sinful in her to keep up an inward wail because she was not completely happy, being rather disposed to dwell on the superfluities of her lot. (636)

In fact marriage is the union of two opposite sexes whose attitudes and opinions about things extant in the world vary from each other. Marriage becomes the source of pleasure when they have faith in each other and sacrifice for the happiness and pleasure of one another. To feel what conjugal life is one must come out of the superficial world and face the bitter realities of human life. Until one remains in the confined domain of superficiality s/he does not face the things one has to see and assimilate with. Dorothea until was in the world of illusion and false ideals which are not practical and realistic did never feel pleasant and happy. Rather she simply fulfilled the demand of the conjugal relationship with Mr. Casaubon. But now she is out of that illusive world and takes Will all in all since both of them love each other

with common understanding and respect. But on the other hand the conjugal life of Rosamond and Lydgate has turned as a source of misery and pain due to mistrust and disrespect to each other's existence. While marrying they would dream of living a comfortable life in the marriage bond but their dream of such happy life turns opposite and becomes a burden to them. Eliot stresses on Rosamond's plight and her feelings:

Rosamond, while these poisoned weapons were being hurled at her, was almost losing the sense of her identity, and seemed to be waking into some new terrible existence. She had no sense of chill resolute repulsion, of reticent self-justification such as she had known under Lydgate's most stormy displeasure; all her sensibility was turned into a bewildering novelty of pain; she felt a new terrified recoil under a lash never experienced before. (638)

The extract above discloses the realistic condition of Rosamond a Victorian woman facing a number of problems due to being unified into a marriage bond. She seems to have lost individual identity and gets introduced through her husband Lydgate. She is doubly cheated one by her husband and next by Will who has also stopped speaking with her. She is short of emotional support and sensual pleasure which turns her life into a deserted and wasteful land. She is confused and her mind is bewildered that she cannot decide ahead and do something her betterment. Thus she is victimized in the male-dominated society of the Victorian time. There is no escape for her from the well of misery and pain. After all her long expected pleasant life gets ruined which is the irony of marriage in patriarchy. Dorothea does see an irony of marriage in the life of women of *Middlemarch*. Thus she expresses her attitudes towards marriage:

Marriage is so unlike everything else. There is something even awful in the nearness it brings. Even if we loved someone else better than those we were married to, it would be no use'-poor Dorothea, in her palpitating anxiety, could only seize her language brokenly-'I mean, marriage drinks up all our power of giving or getting any blessedness in that sort of love. I know it may be very dear but it murders our marriage-and then the marriage stays with us like a murder-and everything else is gone. And then our husband-if he loved and trusted us, and we have not helped him, but made a curse in his life [. . .] (654-5)

As a matter of fact marriage is a pious and holy conciliation between two opposite sexes for companionship of each other to continue the natural process of human race. In the marriage bond naturally both of the partners are equally crucial and essential. Their roles vary due to distinct biological structure and potentiality. Neither of them can live happily and naturally alone. This incapability makes them unified in the conjugal bond. The intention and natural purpose of this sacred union is much democratic and fair. However, social realities do affect the very sacred union and pave a path of inequality to them. The nature and notion of society does play a prominent role in determining their positions. In fact in the male dominated society women are taken as puppets and playthings and their husbands play with them as they wish and prefer. They never think of the fact that women do have mind and can think and feel as they do and can. Rather they ignore the vitality and potentials of women in the human life. The marriage that is initially intended to preserve and provide both of them pleasure and companionship becomes the source of pain and misery. Dorothea has also faced similar agony and undergone the ordeal of marriage in patriarchy and

this is why she understands the life after marriage. Everything turns opposite. The equal partner of life wheel becomes an assistant and dependent slave after getting unified in marriage bond. Each expectation of women turns opposite and this is indeed the irony of marriage in patriarchy. Women lose their identity and get identified through their husbands and at the same time they cannot rationalize since their words become just unheard voice. Moreover their voice sounds clamorous to the husbands. After all, marriage drinks up pleasure and happiness of women and empowers males to rule over women often considered as second sex in patriarchy.

#### IV. Conclusion

*In Middlemarch* the central character, Dorothea who is very idealistic in the initial phase of her life and advocates in the favor of simple and studious life represents the women of the Victorian time. Her focus on learning shows her priority to education and high thought. Despite being a young lady she does not put clothes and jewels commonly worn by women in the patriarchic society. This unusualness makes her fore grounded and the focal character in *Middlemarch*. Dorothea's level of thinking is extraordinary and marvelous which surprises her relatives and makes her become the subject of attraction and discussion. She is much spiritually revolutionary in the sense that she ignores the customs extant in the society and paves her way of life herself and moves on it. Dorothea's lofty conception heightens her position in the society guided by different customs and vain beliefs.

There are certain criteria for a marriageable girl and she is intended to have possessed all those. But Dorothea as peculiar marriageable girl goes beyond such requirements. Rather she attempts her distinct position keeping her away from temptation of patriarchy. Dorothea is very eager to know the truths of life and retains very child like ideas about marriage. In the course of time she comes in the touch of Mr. Casaubon and gets attracted to him not because he is very much similar to her by age but because she finds him having high conception and lofty thought of life.

As an ideal lady, Dorothea is thirsty of knowledge and takes knowledge all in all. Her quest of life seems to have been the person having higher level of thought and distinct attitude towards the human life. Comparatively she considers her less knowledgeable than Mr. Casaubon since she sees in him whatever she does not find in her. She takes him a right and appropriate guide to take her along the grandest path. This sort of evaluation by Dorothea displays the fact that she is fascinated to him a

lot. The society of nineteenth century was very much male-dominated and women were taken as the objects of attraction and unmarried males made numerous efforts to convince ladies for marriage when they found them beautiful and wealthy. Dorothea is beautiful and marriageable as well as she has got a lot of property which attract people like Sir James Chettam. He frequently visits Dorothea since he is much interested in her. He is as a suitor to Dorothea and makes efforts to create conducive environment for marriage with Dorothea. But Dorothea does not have any concern with him. Rather she finds him inappropriate to her for marriage. She feels disappointed due to his readiness.

A sort of psychological tussle emerges between Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon when he gets agitated due to her capacity and sexual wants. In fact there is not physical compatibility between them. However, their relationship like the wall of sand has been established on the intellectual and ideal ground. When they face the bitter truth of conjugal life, they feel that both of them have committed a great mistake. The youth of Dorothea seeks for maximum strength and energy that Mr. Casaubon fails to provide her with which makes the relationship much critical and serious. The age factor plays a very crucial role in the conjugal life. The marriage naturally turns unhappy when there is incompatibility between the spouses. Life is mysterious and people are much more mysterious than this life. What they are determined to do once does not mean they do the same and have the similar attitude towards the very thing. After all changes are tangible in human life due to the fact that everything is in the flux. Dorothea an idealistic lady once committed to living her whole life with Mr. Casaubon, seems a little disappointed when she finds oddity and lack of physical strength to fulfill her desire in Mr. Casaubon. They are psychological detachment between them. In fact the society does not accept the pair which is established on the

ideal ground rather than on the real and natural one. The relationship of Mr. Casaubon and Dorothea is not intolerable to Will.

Mr. Casaubon's male chauvinist nature gets pretty clear in the above extract. He is here as the representative of the Victorian males. He takes his life Dorothea and thinks that he has been fortunate enough to have had such a hired secretary. It is the matter of bitter criticism how inhumanly and irrationally he judges the position of Dorothea that she is just as an employee to him. Hence everything is going on beyond Dorothea's expectation. If she had had any clue of his evil and oppressive nature, she would not have been unified with him in the so-called pious and holy marriage bond. But she saw him a lot of human potentialities and commendable notion. Along with this she took him more educated and considerate who could supple her knowledge in the course of their conjugal life. She didn't think of him in the other way that had been paved by the male-dominated society of the time. That is why a beautiful young lady got married to man twice older than her and was determined to playing the role of a good life partner. Her over devoted nature and belief takes antagonistic mode and ruins her expected life.

Mr. Casaubon takes Dorothea as a lady without any ambitions and purpose so serious. Hence he humiliates the female sex and finds it useless. He considers women as the matter of appreciation and source of entertainment. This biased attitude based on the sex discrimination creates a rift between Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon who stand contrary to each other regarding the way they see the human world. In fact Dorothea gets terribly upset and disappointed since her husband is so biased and mean-spirited whom she believed to have had the higher level of intellect and thought. He is more or less opportunist in the sense that Dorothea has taken him a man having higher thought and the very belief he takes her weakness and attempts to get

benefited from her innocence and ignorance about his true face. He does not speculate that mean-spirited thought will lead to mistrust and emotional detachment from her one day. Since males are socially powerful they use the very power as they wish. Hence Mr. Casaubon despite having many drawbacks ill-treats Dorothea and never attempt to think of her.

After death of Mr. Casaubon Dorothea is left alone and she feels shortage of companionship since life of women in male-dominated society is subject to criticism when they are without socially recognized male partners. The very situation compels her to seek for an alternative male Will Ladislaw and takes emotional shelter in his companionship. It is natural to everyone to do something for existence in society. Whatever Dorothea does is very much commendable and acceptable. She is just on the ground that she seems to have made every effort for the sake of her betterment which is possible only in the marriage institution in patriarchy. But along with this it is prominent as well that women dream of many good and receptive things in the conjugal life which is indeed just the illusion and the very illusion they realize when they get deluded after getting unified in the so-called sacred marriage bond. Dorothea is depicted to display the plight of women who dream of many favorable and fruitful things before marriage but ultimately they face the most disastrous situation in their life. After all this is the irony of conjugal life in the male-dominated society. With the change of time Dorothea does seem to have changed a lot as she has entered the world of reality from the labyrinth of false ideals. When she finds her previous expectation badly shattered, she gets transformed into a practical and material woman and starts looking at the world differently. Thus she has learnt to create her existence in patriarchy that ever prevented her from using her mind and heart freely.

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