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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
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*THE EXPERIENCE OF THE  
19TH CENTURY BRITISH  
WOMEN*

*B.A. THESIS*

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## PREFACE

This is my graduation thesis for a B.A. degree in English Language and Literature. It is about the situation of the 19th century British women in society. Before writing about the experience of the women, I have mentioned political, social, economical, cultural situation in England of the time. I like history and it gives pleasure to me when I read and investigate something about it, my thesis belongs to history and that is why I prepared my thesis on "The Experience of the 19th century British women."

I would like to thank my teachers for all the valuable teaching that I have taken during my four year-education. I would like to give my special thanks to my supervisor and head of the department Associate Professor Dr. Gül Celkan for giving advice for my graduation thesis.

Başak Özkan,

1997.



## II ) INTRODUCTION

### II a) HISTORY OF BRITAIN

Britain is an island only in so far as it is separated by sea from the adjacent continent of Europe. There has never been a period when the nations of the British Isles have been culturally isolated from other national groups. The formation of British ways of life, government, arts, architecture and history are all products of the relationships between people who live in the island and those who do not. British History has been a quiet story of progress towards the united group of nations.

The period of French Revolution and other revolts and the rebellions in 1790s had a great impact on Britain. As a literary person William Wordsworth witnessed revolutionary at first hand and expressed the beauty of a person's relationship with nature:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven.

#### PRELUDE II

Societies sprang up all over the country and communicated with the French and spread ideas of reform to the common people. The change was even disputed within Parliament. The Whigs who had been in opposition since 1783 were calling for the abolition of '**rotten boroughs**'. Outside Parliament there were pressure groups like the Yorkshire Movement. They wanted disfranchise rotten boroughs and gave the spare seats to Yorkshire.

The government of William Pitt tried to pass reform bills in Parliament but he was not successful. As the French Revolution developed and then destroyed the powers of monarchy, attitudes in Britain changed. Edmund Burke, an erstwhile Whig, rallied Tories in his work named **'Reflections on the Revolution in France'**. The extension of democracy could have only one end anarchy.

However, Mary Wollstonecraft attacked Burke's antiliberalism in her work **'Vindication of the Rights of Man'**. Thomas Paine, who had worked with the American revolutionaries, produced **'The Rights of Man'** which was against Burke's attitude about the British constitutions. He proposed that woman should be equal members of society. M.Wollstonecraft helped him to spread out this idea to the society. In her book she argued that woman should be close to political life because they have equal potential with men. It was society which was denying women their rights, they were not a weaker sex.

In 1793 Britain went to war with France. The French had condemned their king to death, promised to help European nations to overthrow their monarchies. Many radical men were arraigned, imprisoned or transported because of treasuring. The war had a terrible effect on the ordinary society prices, taxes went up during the war. Income tax was introduced for the first time. During this time, life standard was terrible, pay was low and food vile. Since the 1780s there had been vocal demands for change. The Anglican Church ruled the country, political rights denied, Presbyterians and Catholics did not vote. By the 1790s United Irish men came together in order to the radical changes. They had coordinated a rebellion with France. The result of the



rebellion was that 30.000 people died.

As the new century approached, Britain was in a state of flux. Ireland joined to Britain as Scotland had been in the early years of the century. Britain became an industrial nation. Wordsworth wrote that it was bliss to be alive but for the young, the poor, the radicals, Catholics, women it was a dark time.

## **War With France**

The war with France had a drastic effect on the country. At first Britain was protecting the seas and the colonies from French naval forces. In 1804 Napoleon planned an invasion of England's south coast in order to construct Martello Towers around the south and east coast of England and the south coast of Ireland. But that invasion never came. Napoleon used to massive army against continental enemies. On the continent Napoleon was victorious. Austria was defeated, Prussia was annihilated at Jean. Finally, Russia was defeated at Friedland. The peace of Tilsit was made, 1807. Napoleon was the master of continent He extended to cross the whole of Europe, including Russia. But Trafalgar ensured that Britain maintained control of the seas. Nelson ruined the French and Spanish fleets in 1805. Meanwhile, Napoleon had begun a new policy to destroy Britain' wealth. He controlled the major ports of the continent and so could control continental trade. If the British fleet blockaded France, he would blockade British trade from the land. This is what is meant by the continental system. The system was launched by the Berlin Decree in 1806, which closed all Europe ports to British shipping.

## **The Peninsular War 1808 & 1814**

In order to enforce the continental system Napoleon had sent an ultimatum to Portugal demanding to close her ports to British goods. He also sent Marshal Junot with a French army to seize the Portuguese fleet. In order to invade Portugal, he had to cross Spain. Napoleon imposed his own brother, Joseph Bonapart as King of Spain. Many Spanish nobles and royal army joined the rebellion. In 1808 the surprising victory was achieved. This was the first major reverse of French army.

## **The 1812 War With America**

America was neutral during the wars between France and Britain. But French ships and English deserters took refuge in the United States and American competition in trade was seen to harm Britain's war effort. There was a conflict between the two nations. It lasted two and a half years with the peace of Ghent in December 1814. But it did not solve the problem. The battle of New Orleans took place three weeks later on 9 January 1815. In the end there was a lesson for Britain. From now on her colonies was not under British tutelage and they were free to formulate their own foreign policy.

## **Foreign Policy 1815 & 1830**

Britain was one of the leading European powers during the Napoleonic Wars and recognized as the equal of Austria and of Russia. Foreign Secretary, Castlereagh, was well informed and had power expert on foreign affairs. He had shown his skills with the Fourth Coalition with

the Treaty of Chaumont in 1814. This treaty was about to protect the peace. Castlereagh obtained a declaration against the slave trade at the Congress of Vienna in 1814 and 1815. His policy toward Europe was to prevent dominant power. He wanted to avoid interference in the internal affairs of nations.

## **Industrial Unrest**

The Continental System had drastic consequences in Britain. Napoleon did not achieve his aim because Prince Regent took over the reins of monarchy. In 1807 the Whigs were succeeded by a Tory government. The Tories had stayed in power for more than twenty years, only changing the leader. Meanwhile, European countries closed their ports.

By 1812 there were three areas where new technology undermined the workhorse. In Lancashire the looms threatened the skilled weavers. In west Yorkshire the mechanical wool croppers trimmed the nap faster. In the east midlands the skilled hose makers were replaced by machines, produced sheets of stocking material which could be cut up and sewn to shape.

The breaking of the machines prompted the government to make it a capital offense. In the agricultural sector, the landlords opened their acres to cultivation. When the war ended and the corn flooded at a cheap price, the landlords were forced into cutting profit margins. Agriculture still dominated Parliament in order to support farmers against an influx of cheap foreign corn in 1816. An Act allowed foreign corn to be imported.



It went against the desires of those who wanted a system of free trade in Europe and it was seen as means of keeping the price of food high to enrich the farmers. The burden on the Poor Law increased and among the workers discontent grew, too.

## **A Growing Realm**

In 1798 Celtic nation was incorporated into the British Crown and government. This was the final confirmation of Pitt's belief in the weakness of Ireland. He feared that the Irish Parliament might have a majority of Catholics and Dissenters. Pitt and the British Government planned to buy the compliance of the Dublin Parliament. Pitt promised to the 300 members of the Dublin Parliament giving money and office. It was expensive but it was achievable. However, the Parliament rejected the proposition and Pitt had to replace the executive with a triumvirate of union supporters. To gain further support, the Irish Parliament was suspended. The leaders of the Catholic population were tempted by the promise of seats in the British Parliament which had thirty-two Irish peers. By January 1801 when the Irish Parliament reconvened, the British government had raised forty eight supporters, and spent 1.260.000 on buying the support of many members of the Commons. There were hundred Irish members in the House of Commons and the thirty two peers.

George III refused to allow the Irish Catholics in to Parliament. Pitt had promised emancipation and seats in Parliament and the regulation of the Catholic Clergy by the British government. All these would happen to secure Catholic acceptance of the Union.

George thought that keeping Catholics out of government would break his coronation oath. The king said that the emancipation of the Catholics had to be dropped. It happened in 1829.

## **Roman Catholic Emancipation, 1829**

The end of the decay was a time of crises for the Tories. In 1827 Lord Liverpool, who held the ministry together, had a stroke and retired. George IV refused Canning as prime minister. But he had to accept him because he was well supported in the House of Commons. Several Tories did not want to be under him, as he favored Roman Catholic Emancipation.

Both Peel and Wellington resigned Canning did not. But suddenly he died of a chill and then Wellington became the Prime Minister. His two years (1828-30) were stormy. The government was not always in control. Roman Catholic Emancipation had disturbed English politics. In the Commons every year, motion for emancipation were presented, but rejected by the Lords. Until 1818 all ministers wanted re-election. So there was to be a by-election in County Clare. It was won by Daniel O'Connell, a Roman Catholic. The crises had come. THE ANNUAL REGISTER put the Emancipation case, 1828.

**'Above all, it is absolutely necessary to grant the demands of the Catholics because otherwise the Catholics would not allow Ireland to enjoy a moment's repose and exposing us every moment to the danger of rebellion, would render that part of the United Kingdom... the source of alarm, of discord... of positive weakness. It was added that the concession was due, as being the**

**consummator in the hope of which alone the people of Ireland had been brought to consent to the Union.'**

Poverty of the people, the harsh land laws, religious differences cause Ireland disorder. Crime, arson, torture, beatings and murder were happened in the countryside. There were also many secret societies, such as the Catholic Defenders, Whiteboys in the south, the Moonlighters or the Treshers. Daniel O'Cannell made a national movement out of these local disorders. First he wanted Roman Catholic Emancipation, thus, he formed the Catholic Association (1823). He was fast becoming the national leader. He knew that civil war threatened in Ireland so he decided to press for Roman Catholic Emancipation. Peel was told it was his duty to save Ireland from this disorder. With great courage, he piloted Emancipation through the Commons in 1829. He had an old-fashioned 18th century view of government. Now Roman Catholics could hold public office. He lost his seat at Oxford University at the 1830 election.

When George IV died in 1830, a general election had to be made. Wellington was the Prime Minister for the King, William IV. But there were demands for Parliamentary Reform.

## **Pressure For Reform**

The Tory Government of Lord Liverpool lasted in 1827 because of pressure for social and political change. The working classes were beginning to act but it was a slow process. The lower middle class support these act but. When the workers became active it was generally under the leadership of the artisans. For instance, in 1816 in London, a meeting to support Henry Hunt turned into riot. There was



no police force to break up the meeting. Protest was driven underground and into violence.

But the following decade was quiet due to the government suppression of public debate. The House of Commons was growing and the Tory Party could not restrain it for much longer. The wealthier middle classes demanded power in economy and in the government.

The agricultural workers of the southern countries opened the decade of the reform. Wages in the rural sector were still low and the corn laws kept food prices high. Because of the depression in agriculture many men and women unemployed. In 1830 workers destroyed the machines and burned hay-ricks in the south east. Four years later, a union of men was organized in secret as the Friendly Society of Agricultural Laborers at Tolpuddle in Dorset by George Loveless. It was connected with the General and National Consolidate Trade Union formed by socialist Robert Owen. The men became heroes of their class.

Pressure for political reform continued. There was always the implication that if reform did not come, more violence would happen.

Reform did come, but the rights to vote was still given to all three mainland countries. New boroughs were created. The government estimated that working class would have a vote. But women would be excluded. The Reform Act became as the great betrayal. Working class men and women realized that they had been left out.

## The Poor Law

The government began to examine the problems of the Poor Law. The dreadful economic in the post-war period increased in the demand on the Poor Law. This was felt by the middle classes and a Royal Commission reported to tidy up the Poor Law. Such principles of efficiency were applied to the Poor Law. The people on the Royal Commission who created the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 were concerned to cut the numbers of poor. They insisted that relief could be given only in the workhouse. Children were separated from parents and husbands from wives. Workhouses coped with the reality of the system in the agricultural south. But the Act seems to have been effective. The real trouble was in the north. In the north of England and industrial Wales, they were incapable of working.

## Chartism

The 1830s and 1840s were not peaceful times in Britain. Wealthy industrialists supported the Anti-Corn Law League and wanted to break the political power of the landed classes. They did not succeed. They had a Parliamentary vote. But the working class had no vote, believing that if they could elect working class Mps, then government would understand working class problems. One cause of Chartism was the hope of improving the living and working conditions.

J.R. Stephens declared **'Chartism is no political movement, where the main question is getting the ballot... This question of universal suffrage is a knife and fork question, after all... a bread and cheese question, not withstanding all that has been said against it'**.



The movement gained support in the slump between 1837 & 1842 when unemployment was extremely wide-spread. Chartism actually began in London when William Lovett formed the London Working Men's Association (1836). But Chartism collapsed because the full weight of the governing classes was thrown against it. The movement was divided in leadership and was not concentrated as a national movement with a single political aim.

## **Towards Parliamentary Reform**

In 1846 the government was a coalition of the Whigs and their radical allies. It was seen as a liberal government instead of the older Whig Party. But the Whig members were the majority of the government. In the Commons the leader of the Tory Party was Benjamin Disraeli, yet there was a large anti-Jewish in the party. They did not accept Disraeli and the Earl of Derby became the official leader. On the opposite side Disraeli and Derby worked hard to win back Peelites and began to build an effective opposition party by 1860. The Conservative Party of Lord Derby took office and committed itself to a new Reform Bill. After Derby resigned as Prime Minister and was succeeded by Disraeli. The Second Reform Act increased the number of working class Mps. But women were still excluded. When Disraeli took his party hoping to capitalise as a reformer, the new electorate rejected it. William Gladstone and his Liberal Party became the first Reform Government.



## TIME CHART

- 1789      The French Revolution
- 1790      **'Reflections on the Revolution in France'** by Edmund Burke **'Vindication of the Rights of Man'** by Mary Wollstonecraft are published.
- 1793      Britain at war with France.
- 1795      Speenhamland System of poor relief is introduced.
- 1798      Publication of **'Essay on Population'** by T.R.Malthus. First **'Lyrical Ballads'** published by Wordsworth and Coleridge.
- 1801      Union with Ireland
- 1802      Peace of Amiens, ending war with France.  
Despard's Plot. Peel introduces factory legislation.
- 1803      War with France
- 1805      Battle of Trafalgar: French and Spanish fleets are defeated by Nelson.
- 1806      Continental System began.
- 1804-14   Peninsular War
- 1811      George, Prince of Wales, is made Regent.
- 1812-16   Luddite risings.
- 1815      Battle of Waterloo: Napoleon is defeated.  
Corn Laws passed.
- 1817      Pentrich Rebellion
- 1819      Peterloo Massacre: 11 killed and 400 wounded by troops and reform meeting.
- 1820      Bonnymuir Rising and Cato Street Plot.  
Death of George III: accession of George IV.

- 1829 Catholic Emancipation where by most Catholic civil rights are granted.
- 1830 Death of George IV: accession of William IV.
- 1830-32 Cholera epidemic
- 1831 Merthyr Rising.
- 1832 Reform Act
- 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act.  
Slavery abolished in the British Empire.  
Tolpuddle Martyr's are transported.
- 1837 Death of William IV: accession of Victoria.
- 1839 Chartist Petition presented, Newport and Rebecca Riots.
- 1842 Second Chartist Petition and Plug Riots.
- 1848 Final Chartist Petition
- 1851 The Great Exhibition,  
Harriet Taylor publishes '**The Enfranchisement of Women**'.
- 1854-6 Crimean War
- 1857 Indian Mutiny
- 1857-8 Second Opium War opens China to European trade.
- 1859 C.Darwin publishes '**Origin of the Species**'.
- 1861 Death of Prince Albert.
- 1867 Second Reform Bill
- 1868 First Trade Union Congress,  
Disraeli's first Conservative Government
- 1868-74 Gladstone's first Liberal Government
- 1869 Opening of the Suez Canal
- 1870 Education Act allows all children to attend elementary schools.

- Dickens dies.
- 1872 Scottish Education Act reorganizes schools.
- 1873-80s Great Depression
- 1876 Victoria became Empress of India.  
Massacre of Christians in Turkish Bulgaria leads to anti-Turkish Campaign in Britain.
- 1878 Congress of Berlin reaches agreement on Turkey.  
Britain gains the island of Cyprus.
- 1879 Zulu War
- 1880-1 First Anglo-Boer War
- 1882 Britain occupies Egypt.
- 1885 Death of Gorton at Khartoum.
- 1886 First Irish Home Rule Bill introduced by Gladstone's Government.
- 1888 Matchgirl's strike
- 1889 Docker's strike
- 1893 Second Irish Home Rule Bill defeated in Lords.
- 1896 Sudan conquered.
- 1899 Rowntree's survey began.
- 1899-1902 Second Anglo-Boer War



## **II b) SOCIAL, ECONOMICAL, CULTURAL SITUATION IN THE 19TH CENTURY BRITAIN**

### **Social Conditions**

#### **Population Growth**

One of the most important changes of the 19th century was the increase of population. Thus, conditions would never be the same again. There was a tremendous increase both in towns and countries.

This created new problems and conditions. The population increase affected the whole country but in the big towns. The well-off and the poor had lived side by side in towns.

#### **Public Health**

During the nineteenth there was also an effort to improve the conditions of poor people. In the 1830s several committees came together and read their worrying reports. There was widespread interest in social conditions.

One of the problem was the absence of main drainage's. Death was a constant companion, sometimes the coffin could lie for several days. Rats might gnaw the corpse in its open coffin. Urban graveyards were full. Water supply was a major problem. The Thames was tidal, so the filthy waste was washed several times. The situation was so bad, in 1858 there was the '**great stink**'. If drinking water were drawn from local wells or if it had been piped to a stand-pipe, there was danger

from cesspools, graveyards or slaughter houses. Doctors were just beginning to understand the infection, how diseases spread. Many doctors supposed that disease was caused by 'bad air'. In fact bad smells came from chemical action by microbes and other organisms. This caused the infection. This was understood later in the century. The most effective disease was cholera. It struck first in 1831 until the 1860s. Especially in the summer months, killed rich people as well as poor. In 1866 cholera epidemic killed over 6000 people in London alone. Edwin Chadwick had been drawn to the problem of public health by his work on the Poor Laws. He published '**Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population**' (1842), dealing with the nature problem. He also suggested street cleaning. The Health of Towns Association (1839) was founded. After long years many of the problems were solved.

### **Housing**

The Victorians were pragmatists, they did what they thought. This is reflected in their attitude to housing. There were four types of housing in late Victorian-English towns:

- 1) large villas or substantial terraces with big gardens; for the well-off with their large families and perhaps several servants,
- 2) terraces of well-built small houses with a small garden; for the clerks and artisans,
- 3) terraces of crowded housing with little greenery or trees; for the ordinary poor,
- 4) the real slum areas; for the very poor.

## **Town and Country Houses**

The architecture of the time was distinctive. The designs were formal, simple and strongly classical.

**a) Town Houses :** The town house was compact which had a terrace or with a garden, leading to a coach house and stables. A mews would divide one terrace from another for servants in order to get the coach and horses. The big houses were built of brick or stone. Houses of this period had sash windows. The ground floor and the first floor of the big houses had tall windows. The family would sleep on the second floor. Servants room were small and crowded. The furniture in the best rooms was of high quality. The kitchen was in the basement.

**b) Country Houses :** The country house had gardens with full of trees and plants. This gives the house better view. The Georgian country house was generally based on Palladian principles. The Palladian style came from Andeas Palladio in Italy and was introduced by Lord Burlington whose villa at Chiswick is one of the best example of a Palladian villa in Britain. The style became very popular and carried to Georgian Priod. The principal rooms were decorated with plaster work, the great hall was surmounted by a dome. Gothic style became popular. The Gothic buildings used new types of building material, especially iron. Gothic revival buildings achieved great success in Victorian hands. For example, Gilbert Scott's work.



## Town Life

By the end of the nineteenth century the English people had become a nation of city and town dwellers. In 1801 more than one-third of the population of England and Wales had lived in an urban environment, but by mid-century this had risen.

Population			
	Total	Urban	Urban Percentage
1801	8.900.000	3.100.000	34.8
1851	17.900.000	9.000.000	50.2
1881	26.000.000	17.600.000	67.9
1901	32.500.000	25.100.000	77.0

England had become the world's first predominantly urbanized industrial nation. This situation forced the Victorians to learn how to live a new urban way of life. In an article of **'Quarterly Review'** on April 1873, was written **'Possibly the life of England is changing, perhaps has already changed, far more than we realize'**.

## Religious Life

**'Very hard to come at the actual belief of any man'.**

Religion had an important place in the minds of most middle and upper class Victorians. As population grew, thousands of churches were built. Between 1840 and 1876 the Anglican alone built 1.727 new churches in England and Wales and rebuilt or restored 7.144. The Presbyterian Church of England was formed in 1876.

The church of England was active in the country districts and weaker in the industrial towns where the parish system was less effective. The Bible Christians and Primitive methods were among agricultural workers; the Wesleyans among shopkeepers and small businessmen. The Baptist was in the east midlands, East Anglia and the west country. The Presbyterians were strongest in the border countries, the Catholics in Lancashire.

## Cultural Life

### ‘Art for art’s sake’

In the nineteenth century ‘aestheticism’ came into vogue in painting and literature, under the slogan of ‘art for art’s sake’. This cry was taken from Gautier, the French writer, who had first used in his poem L’Art :

Tout passe - L’art robuste

Seul a l’éternité ;

Le buste

Survit a la cité .

Aestheticism offered both for belief in political progress and for religious expectation. The aesthetic movement was too intellectual that had a visible influence. The word of ‘art’ came into use as an indicator of sensitive design. Art textiles, art pottery, art wallpaper, art furniture, art jewelry made during the 1870s and 1880s brought lasting benefit to design. Under the aesthetic influence colors for dress and decoration became softer. Heavy dark furniture went out of fashion. The man who came to personify aestheticism in the eyes of public was Oscar Wilde.

By the late 1880s 'aestheticism' was changing into 'decadence'. The decadents were against the admiration of beauty. They preferred pessimism, the abnormal. They were suspected of drugtaking and homosexuality. The decadent writers of the 1890s remained a minority. This minority was opposed by the 'counter-decadents' who gathered the 'National Observer' edited by W.E. Henley. The English decadent movement subsided after the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde for homosexual practices in 1895. But this kind of mood in general did not finish with the fooling of decadence.

## **Economic Life**

Domestic service was the biggest single employment for women, whereas agricultural labouring the biggest single job for men. These were both traditional occupations and very different from the industrial work. At first the small workshop of industry rather than factories was the centre of production.

By the end of the 1860s Britain was entering one of the greatest period of the whole century. The 1850s and 1860s and early 1870s was an era of great economic growth. In textiles, the largest industrial sector, stimulated innovation and investment. In full activity the British economy became the strongest in the world. British exports were growing very fast decade by decade. Imports even outran exports in growth. Britain was becoming increasingly dependent upon imported food. By 1870s about half of cheese and butter requirements were



imported and one-fifth of meat.

The balance on trade was beginning to grow rapidly because of London's position as the world financial centre. The great Victorian political and economic analyst, Walter Bagehot, described the city as **'by far the greatest combination of economical power and economical delicacy that the world has ever seen'**. Mid-Victorian Britain regarded itself as **"the workshop of the world"**. Britain had won nearly all the scientific, technological and industrial awards at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

By the 1860s Britain had become a country of free trade. British markets were now open to foreign goods and materials. Yet British markets were not now flooded with foreign goods. Agriculture became less important because industry gained importance. The cultivation of land was in the hands of tenant farmers. The landowners made the permanent works on their estates. To have a large estate brought high social status much higher than success in commerce. The biggest peer-landowners, such as the Dukes of Northumberland, Devonshire, Buccleugh owned thousands of acres.

The condition of the agricultural labourers and their families was different from place to place, season to season and year to year. Day labourers could earn well at harvest time but during the rest of the year they could not.

During the nineteenth century agricultural labour began to lose its importance because of industrial growing.

## III) VICTORIAN AGE

### III a) VICTORIAN FRAME OF MIND

In 1858 a Victorian critic Sir Henry Holland did not call it neither the age of democracy or industry or science, nor of earnestness or optimism. The basic and the universal conception of the period was that **'we are living in an age of transition'**. And it is peculiarly Victorian. Although all ages are **'ages of transition'** before no men thought of their own time as an era of change from the past to the future.

According to John Stuart Mill and the Victorians, the past which they had outgrown was not the Romantic Period and not the eighteenth century. It was the Middle Ages. They recognised that there were differences between themselves and their predecessors. For instance, they had broken many rules such as Christian Orthodoxy under the rule of the church and civil government under the rule of king and nobility, the social structure of fixed classes and the economic organisation of village agriculture and town guilds.

By starting of the Renaissance and the Reformation big changes had begun much earlier. For the first time, Milton had realized that Europe was in a state of transition. But in England it was not realized at the time. After the attack on the church by Whig liberals and Benthamite agnostics and with the outbreak of the 1830 revolutions abroad, men suddenly realized that they were living in an age of radical change and said **'old opinions, feelings, ancestral customs and institutions are crumbling away and both the spiritual and temporal worlds are darkened by the shadow of change'**.

To Carlyle and Ruskin and Thomas Arnold it was the time of dying feudalism. Victorians like Thackeray felt that they had lived in two distinct worlds:

**'It was only yesterday; but what a gulf between now and then! Then was the old world Stage-coaches, more or less swift, riding horses, pack-horses, highway-man, knights in armour, Norman invaders, Roman legions, Druids, Ancient Britons painted blue and so forth-all these belong to the old period. I will concede a halt in the midst of it and allow that gunpowder and printing tended to modernise the world. But your railroad starts the new era and we of a certain age belong to the new time and the old one. We are of the time of chivalry as well as the Black Prince of Sir Walter Manny. We are the age of steam'.**

Carlyle had made a comparison between Middle Ages and the nineteenth century in his work called **'Past and Present'**.

This was the age of transition which covered both destruction and reconstruction. Bulwer Lytton continued **'The age then is one of destruction!...Miserable would be our lot were it not also an age of preparation for reconstruction'**.

## **The State Of Society**

Democracy and industrial society had replaced the feudal and agrarian by the late nineteenth century. With the emergence of democracy political power was transferred from the aristocracy to the ordinary people by the successive Reform Bills of 1832, 1867 and 1884 and



society became democratic. Mill called the distinguishing feature of modern institutions and modern life itself the fact **'that human beings are no longer born to their place in life... but are free to employ their faculties and such favourable chances as offer, to achieve the lot which may appear to them most desirable'**. Because of the democratic ideas about the rights of man, this old conception changed. Men had gone out from the land and had opened the new and independent careers. In politics, the Industrial Revolution underlay the democratic revolution.

The bankers and manufacturers who gained political power through the revolutionary legislation of 1828 & 1835, owed their victory to the financial and psychological power they got from the Industrial Revolution. Middle class attained both political power and financial eminent.

The Victorian Frame of Mind is largely composed of their characteristic modes of thought and feeling. The tremendous industrial development was more striking at the time than democracy. New machines were used for manufacturing and communication. There was the wonderful increase of industrial production by the application of machinery, the improvement of old technical process and the invention of new ones.

Canals, macadam roads, railways and steamboats revolutionized the economic life of England. The manufacturer bought his materials in the cheapest market and sold them in the highest and hired his labor wherever he liked. In this dynamic, free-wheeling society people felt the anormous pressure of work. When new railroad and steamship

were being opened up, people showed great interest to new markets.

When class lines broke down and it became the summit by one's own zealous efforts, the struggle for success was complemented by the struggle for rank. Apart from personal ambitions, one's expenses had increased because of the existence of hundreds of objects. The style of living in the middle and upper classes had grown. George Eliot remarked that 3000 pound had seemed wealth to provincial families a year in 1830, **'innocent of future gold-fields and of that gorgeous plutocracy which has so nobly exalted the necessities of genteel life'**.

Both the tempo of work and the tempo of living had increased with striking impact so that one observer thought that **'the most salient characteristic of life in this latter portion of the 19th century is its SPEED'**. Until the Victorian period the rate of locomotion and communication was same for centuries. The horse and the vessel were still the fastest things on earth. But within a few years the speed of travel increased from twelve to fifty miles an hour on the new railroads. Faster locomotion increased the number of people and the rush from one to another. Once upon a time **'people did not run about the town or the land as we do'**. They travelled less often and did not hurry to catch trains. Now **'we are whirled about and hooted around and rung up as if we were all parcels'**. It seems that the Victorian period is less modern. As it is seen the speed of life has increased in the twentieth century but the sense of speed has declined.

The sense of speed and more crowded living had its intellectual and



mechanical basis. People became more educational with the enormous expansion of knowledge and the corresponding increase of publication books and newspapers. George Eliot said that in a threnody **'even idleness is eager now, -eager for amusement; prone to excursiontrains, art-museums, periodical literature and exciting novels; prone even to scientific theorizing and cursory peeps through micro-scopes'**. By the sixties Frances Cobbe was comparing her own generation of 1950 with of 1850 :

**'That constant sense of being driven-not precisely like 'dumb' cattle but cattle who must read, write and talk more in twenty-four hours than twenty-four hours will permit, can never have been known to them'**.

## **The State Of Human Mind**

At first the radical transition was less apparent in the human mind than in society but later sensitive observer understood that people began to think more widely rather than cliché. By 1838 Thomas Arnold had noticed a new **'atmosphere of unrest and paradox hanging around many of our ablest young men of the present day'**. He was speaking **'of questions as to great points in moral and intellectual matters;where things which have been settled for centuries seem to be again brought into discussion'**. This is a kind of atmosphere which was pointed out in the early essays of Macaulay and Carlyle. In 1850 it was the fusion and transition age.Traditional thoughts were thrown.

In the seventies men searched for how to break up conventional ideas in order to gain clear light about their future.



By the eighties the disintegration of opinion was so rapid. Thus, both intelligent men and foolish were equally ignorant. Victorians had to live between two worlds, one dead or dying, are struggling powerlessly to be born in an age of doubt.

There is a radical contrast between the Victorians and ourselves. One modern critic thought that **'a spirit of certitude wonderful to us who live in an age which has taken the note of interrogation as its emblem, impregnated the great Victorians'**. Another has claimed that **'the old certainties were certainties no longer'** and **'everything was held to be open to question'**; and that **'the Victorians seemed to themselves to be living in a house built on unshakable foundations and established in perpetuity...the Home, the Constitution, the Empire, the Christian religion-each of these... was accepted as a final revelation'**. Moral values were firm until about 1870. At this time all intellectual theories such as morality were insecure. John Marley said about sixties and fifties **'it was the age of science, new knowledge, searching criticism, followed by multiplied doubts and shaken beliefs'**. The effort to resolve the situation made it worse. New solutions raised new controversies which raised new questions. J.A. Froude wrote in his book **'Intellectuality'** that **'the controversies to which I had listened had unsettled me. Difficulties had been suggested which I need not have heard of, but out of which some road or other had now to be looked for'**. According to Mill, a person faced many alternatives not only in religion. Is there a God or not, and if so is he a person or an impersonal force? Is there a heaven and a hell? What is Christianity?

Roman Catholicism or Protestantism? Is it church or chapel? High church or broad or low church? Some kind of questions such as above inveded ethical theory and conception of man.

The communism of 1848 in France opened Victorian eyes to the possibility that the old political economy was limited and temporary. The middle class government was confirmed by the Reform Bill of 1867. By 1870 the populace had an uncertain future. More educated classes had knowledge and opinions about the facts.

The historical method was formulated under the influences of Romantic and scientific conception of development. It meant the study of social phenomena of all kinds, institutions, customs, beliefs. One no longer asked, what do I think of this? Is it good? Is it true? The right question became: How shall I account for it? Why did men believe that it was good or true? Though the Victorians were certain that truth existed and the mind could discover it, they found themselves in doubt. The normal state of the Victorian mind was one of the indecision or suspended judgement. For instance, one was not sure he believed what he believed. But this does not mean that no one had any strong beliefs. Most Victorians were described by Mill in **'The Spirit of the Age'** : **'The men of all the present day rather incline to an opinion that embrace it; few have full confidence in their own convictions'**.

Behold, we know not anything;  
I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last-far off-at last, to all.

I trust I have not wasted breath:  
I think we are not wholly brain,  
Magnetin Mockeries.

The Power in darkness whom we guess.

Tennyson expressed that '**In Memoriam**' is not a poem of belief or of unbelief. It is a poem of doubt, that is, of doubtful beliefs.

There were two emotional attitudes, which occurred in a period of conscious and radical change, and which were nourished by the same social and intellectual developments. The Victorians reacted to their age with hope and dismay, optimism and anxiety.

### **III b) VICTORIAN ENGLAND**

#### **The Social Impact Of Industrialisation Before 1850**

##### **The Birth of Class**

Eric Hobsbawm writes in the introduction of his book '**The Age of Revolution**', '**words are witnessed which often speak louder than documents**'. He lists a number of words which gained their modern usage between the French Revolution and the mid nineteenth century. These are industry, industrialist, factor, capitalism, socialism, liberal, conservative, statistics, sociology, proletariat, crises, strike, pauperism, railway, engineer. The list also includes '**middle class**' and '**working class**' which had a fundamental change in the very framework of society.



There are different social class explanations: A historian, Arthur Marwick, defines a class society: 'A class society is not the same as a caste society nor is it the same as a pre-industrial society of estates and orders. It is not the same as a status society in which there is a continuous gradation of strata rather than a relatively small number of discrete classes. It is not the same as a classless society in which either there are no inequalities or in which any inequalities are totally based on variations in natural talent. In modern societies there are manifest inequalities based on sex, race and age. In certain societies the inhabitants of particular regions or the members of particular religious faiths, have been at a disadvantage: these are not class distinctions. Classes are grouping across society, broadly recognised by members of that society, involving inequalities or certainly differences in such areas as power, authority, wealth, income, prestige, working conditions, life styles and culture'.

Then, social class is simply a means of classifying or placing people into recognisable groups. The factors are occupation, income, education, where a person lives, religion, how he spends his income, how he dresses and so on.

Sociologists considered the social categories by the late nineteenth century. German sociologist Max Weber identified three dimensions: class, status and party. With Weber class is an economic grouping which depends on the value of a person's labour and his share of property. Those who have similar work or in a similar position in the labour market take place in the same class. Status arises from the basic

positive and negative qualities of people. Party represents the organisations in order to get power. Political parties are obvious examples. Simply, the economic status of society is defined by classes, by social status groups and by the political parties.

The nineteenth century had two status divisions, namely the 'gentleman' and the 'respectable'. The gentleman might be a member of the aristocracy or could be equal with a member of middle class profession. Although respectability was a quality associated with the middle class, the ranks of the respectable included many peers and peeresses and many working men and women.

Industrialisation affected the pattern of society in many ways. Firstly, middle class people found many opportunities for the creation of wealth. Therefore, middle class was aware of its identity with its own character and ideals. Free competition and individual effort were the most significant.

### **The Standart-of-living Controversy**

The standart of living has been described by Peter Mathias as '**the most sustained single controversy in Britain economic history**'. In the first place he agrues that '**there seems no possibility of an unchallengeable answer to such a diffuse, many-sided question**'. Mathias's second point is that '**the debate has always been suffused with current political values. Essentially it has been a judgement on capitalism about the social consequences of the operation of the free-market economy**'.

The standart of living is an economic phenomenon. It is measured by a person's real income which is governed by his money earnings and the price of the goods he needs to buy.

In the nineteenth century people had difficulties. They could not buy their needs easily because of low salary and high prices. For instance, bread was a staple part of the diet in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The trend in sugar and beer consumption was downwards until 1845, while the remained stationary throughout the period. Milk consumption was low and until 1902 Britain was the smallest milk-drinking nation of Europe. Fish, in our times a major source of protein, was less favoured in the early nineteenth century because of religious (i.e. anti-Catholic) prejudice but also because of its high price. The problem was not only in food but also renting the house was the most big problem for the working class people. Rents rose between 1800 & 1850. There were regional differences. Between 1830 & 1914 London was the most expensive place to live in. Another problem was in clothing. Few people bought new clothes. John O'Grinfield expresses his sorrow in that popular ballad:

I'm a poor cotton weaver as many a one knows,  
I've nowt t'eat i' th' house and I've worn out my clothes;  
You'd hardly give sixpence for all I've got on,  
My clogs they are bursten and stocking I've none.  
You'd think it wur hard to be sent to the world  
For to clam (starve) and do best that you can...



# **Social Problems In The Age Of Laissez-Faire**

## **The Nature of Social Problems**

The Victorian Age had many harrowing social problems especially in the countryside. For example, pauperism was one of the important problem in the agricultural countries. Macaulay saw pauperism as a basic rural problem:

**‘The poor-rate is very decidedly lower in the manufacturing than in the agricultural districts... the amount of parish relief required by the labourers in the different counties of England, is almost exactly in inverse proportion to the degree in which the manufacturing system has been introduced into these counties. We find the poor-rate highest in Sussex. Then come Buckinghamshire, Essex, Suffolk, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Kent and Norfolk’.**

Housing was another problem in urban England. F.G. Heath in **‘Peasant Life in the West of England’** pointed out a cottage in Devon in 1883:

**‘Never had we witnessed so bad a sight as we saw in that miserable garret of a miserable hut. There was one bedstead, besides two other-we can not say articles of furniture-things purporting to represent a table and a chair on the bare floor. On the bedstead, in the darkest corner of the room, lay the poor old bedridden grandmother, her poor wrinkled face looking the picture of patient and uncomplaining misery. Nothing on the floor besides the wretched bedstead and the table and the chair; no**

**pictures, even of the rudest kind, on the walls’.**

As the century progressed there was not only a growing awareness of the problems but also a concern to find solutions. There was an explosion of social investigation. The statistical society of London was founded in 1834 in order to arrange and publish **‘Facts calculated to illustrate the Condition and Prospects of Society’**. More and more people came to be aware of the problems of the day and sought methods to solve them.

## **The Great Victorian Boom**

### **The Great Exhibition**

Mass production had made Britain the **‘workshop of the world’**. There was considerable enthusiasm for the idea of a huge exhibition to reveal to the world Britain's industrial capacity. The exhibition would also encourage international trade and promote international peace and harmony.

On 1 May 1851 over half a million people crowded into Hyde Park, all hoping to catch a glimpse of the Queen when she came to open the Great Exhibition.

The Illustrated London News published a song for the Great Exhibition entitled **‘The Festival of Labour’**.

Gather, ye Nations, gather!  
From forge and mine and mill!  
Come, science and Invention;  
Come, Industry and Skill!

Come, with your woven wonders,  
The blossoms of the Loom,  
The rival Nature's fairest flowers  
In all but their perfume;  
Come with your brass and iron,  
Your silver and your gold ,  
And arts that change the face of earth,  
Unknown to men of old.  
Gather, ye Nations, gather!  
From every clime and soil,  
The new Confederation,  
The Jubilee of toil.

## **Britain And The World**

### **The Opening up of the World**

The late nineteenth century was a period of a revolution in communications. Breakwaters, ports, harbours, lighthouses and other shipping aids were created in every part of the world; roads, tunnels, bridges were built in every continent. International agreements were generally evolved by the western nations in an attempt to create a unified world economy.

Great Britain played a key role in the world railway development. They were built to serve western needs. Overseas railway building exhibits the three facets of international economic relations: the exports of goods, the export of capital and export of men. Overseas railway had a great attraction for British investors. British engineers planned the lines and British navvies built them. For example, in 1841



the Paris - Rouen railway was constructed by British workers.

### **The Coming of Free Trade**

Foreign trade had an influence on the British economy throughout the nineteenth century. The climax of free trade came in 1860 with Gladstone's budget and the Cobden treaty with France. Manufacturers especially in cotton textiles felt greater confidence in domestic and foreign markets and Manchester became the Mecca of free trade. The growth of Britain's foreign trade was so great in the late nineteenth century. With this system many people in different class and work breathed freely.

## **A New Era**

### **Great Britain and her Competitors**

Growing competition in the world trade and the rapid industrialisation of countries such as Germany and the United States gave the sign that British economic supremacy was coming to an end.

In 1870 Britain accounted nearly one-third of the world's manufacturing output while her nearest rival, the United States, produced less than a quarter. However, at the end of the nineteenth century, as the new era was coming, Britain had fallen to third place. In her overseas trade there was a decline, too. In 1880 Britain's overseas trade was twice more than her nearest rival. But it did not continue. Later America became the world's greatest trading nation. In many areas Britain lost her place and became the third country.

## IV) VICTORIAN WOMEN

### IVa) THE CHANGING ROLES OF WOMEN IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

When Queen Victoria came to the throne all women of classes were subject to laws. They were on a par with male criminals, lunatics and minors. But under the common law married women had no identity that **'husband and wife are one person and the husband is that person'**. Wages, skills, occupations, relation of production were discussed as if they were male prerogative. The classic English man of the time had certain qualities such as leadership, courage, justice and honour. The qualities of English woman were domestic and maternal duties. Consciously or unconsciously in the standard family the husband was the breadwinner and the wife had remained at home in order to the housework and to attend to child-care. Before 1839 the father had absolute rights over his children. In one a husband seized and carried away a baby as his wife was nursing it in her mother's house. In another the husband gave his wife's legitimate child to his mistress. The privileges on the wife's side were few. The husband had responsibility for her debts during their marriage.

A male-dominated society was expressed by Tennyson in his 1847 poem, *THE PRINCESS*.

...but this is fix'd

As are the roots of earth and base of all.

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:

Man for the sword and for the needle she:

Man with the head and woman with the hearth:

All else is confusion...

The image of the 'active' male and 'passive' female was developed by John Ruskin in his essay 'Of Queens Gardens' published in 1865.

**'We are foolish and without excuse foolish, in speaking of the superiority of one sex to another, as if they could be compared in similar things. Each has what the other has not: each completes the other and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike and the happiness and the perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give...'**

**'The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war and for conquest. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle. Her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering arrangement and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their places'.**

In the traditional society wives had helped their husbands in their business and professions and in the same way they participated in domestic industry. The wives of merchants and shopkeepers managed the warehouse or shop and kept the accounts. Farmers' wives took charge of the dairy and the smaller animals. The wives of doctors and lawyers had dispensed drugs and wrote out documents. The living



standart began to rise. Servants and clerks took jobs from wives and daughters. But there was on idea that a woman could not work but be a 'lady'.

Later Arthur J.Lamb wrote the popular music hall song, '**She's only a bird in a gilded cage**'.

If the woman's place was her home, then marriage was the end to which she was directed from birth.

In 1818 in the North of England the women made a Cap of Liberty. They described it as '**the emblem that has over been held sacred to the people**'. These women were the members of the Female Reform society who believed that parliamentary reform would solve the economic problem caused by the long war against France and the new factory system.

The emancipation of women involved political democracy, a cooperative economy and a challange to male power in law. It also consisted of the of the power of the values of society.

Women formed unions and set up female lodges. Many women worked in the factory system through the textite industry. Many of them made lace and straws bonnets. The unions were founded which were the responsible for infants '**and adults**' education. It was thought that education should be controlled by the working class.

The war and the factory system had an effect on workers. In the 1830s clothing workers faced a reduction of pay. Skilled tailors began to argue that women should be banned from the industry because it

was thought that the women took work away from men. In her book **'The Pioneer'** M.Wollstonecraft argued for an equal pay: **'the low wages of women are not so much the voluntary price she sets upon her labour as the price which is fixed by the tyrannical influence of male supremacy'**.

In 1838, in the North of England organized a meeting to protest against the New Poor Law. They decided to appeal to the young Queen Victoria to say her the cruelty of the new act. They also argued as mothers with family responsibilities, saying it separated the mothers from the children. The Poor Law also prevented women doing their duties as wives and helpmates.

The women thought that the vote was the key of power and this idea brought many women into the Chartist Movement. They were a vital force in the social movement. They wanted to gain the power of the franchise.

### **The Reform of Girls' Education**

British society had changed from the 1850s after the Chartist and European revolutions. In 1859 a **'Society for Promoting the Employment of Women'** was founded. The improvement of education was seen as a key issue. Schools and colleges were set by Emily Davies, Miss Buss, Miss Beale and Anne Jemina Clough. In 1868 the National Society for Women's Suffrage was formed. The qualities of the English woman such as domestic and maternal duties were began to change with the feminism movements.

Britain's first woman doctor, Elizabeth Garrett, wrote to Emily Davies

as she was about to start her medical studies (1860):

**‘Evidence is modifying my notions about the most suitable style of dress for me to wear at the hospital. I feel confident now that one is helped rather than hindered by being as much like a lady as lies in one's power. When my student life begins, I shall try to get very serviceable, rich, whole coloured dresses that will do without trimmings and not required’.**

There are several ways that the education of girls can be approached. One approach may be called assimilation and derives from a view that there are no differences between boys and girls. The second approach sees girls as handicapped in comparison with boys. There was much debate in Victorian time about the effects of education on girls health. Henry Maudslay, a professor at University College London, wrote in the **‘Fortnightly Review’** in 1874:

**‘The girl enters upon the hard work of school or college at the age of fifteen years when the function of her sex has perhaps been fairly established; ambitious to stand high in class, she pursues her studies with diligence, perseverance, constancy, allowing herself no days of relaxation or rest out of schooldays, paying no attention of the periodical tides of her organization. For a time all seems to go well with her studies. But in the long run nature, health fails, she becomes the victim of aches and pains’.**

On the other hand, feminists argued that **‘a vacant mind revenges itself on the body’**. They managed to speak out.

Secondary and higher education were closely linked in the nineteenth



century. Emily Davies argued that the only equal educational system for girls would be understood by testing boys' education in equal examinations with girls. In 1862 Emily Davies tried to allowing girls to take their local examinations at both Oxford and Cambridge. The response from Oxford was discouraging but the Cambridge authorities encouraged her about the examinations. The University of Cambridge opened its examinations to girls candidates. In 1869 Emily Davies opened a college for girls at Hitchin, a town between Cambridge and London. In 1880 Victoria University admitted woman to its degree as Durham did in 1895. However, Oxford did not admit women to its degree until 1919. Yet Cambridge and Oxford retained an attraction for women even without the degree.

## **Women At Work**

There was considerable change in the occupations in which women were employed. In 1851 Census counted that three-quarters of 3.462.000 wives in Great Britain who had no specific occupation. The largest groups were those wives of farmers, inkeepers and shopkeepers. On the other hand, those who helped their husbands or who took in washing or needlework, did not look upon themselves as employed. The working lives of most women outside the upper and middle classes was washing, cleaning, charring, various sorts of work done at home. Domestic service was the greatest employer of women. Domestic service was considered an appropriate occupation for working class girls. A writer in the '**National Review**' of April 1862 observed:

**'they discharge a most important and indispensable function in**

social life; they do not follow an obligatory independent and therefore for their sex an unnatural, career: on the contrary, they are attached to the others and are connected with other existence, which they embellish, facilitate and serve. In a word, they fulfil both essentials of women's being; they are supported by, and they minister to, men. We could not possibly do without them. Nature has not provided one too many...'

A picture of the charms of domestic service was painted by J.D.Milne in 'The Industrial and Social Position of Women' , 1857:

'The situation of a domestic servant is attended with considerable comfort. It combines a wonderful degree of liberty, discipline, health, physical comfort, good example, regularity, room for advancement, encouragement to acquire saving habits. The most numerous class of depositors in the Savings Banks is that of domestic servants. The situation frequently involves much responsibility and calls forth the best features of character. Kind attachment in return for honest service is not uncommon with the master or mistress; and an honest pride in the relation springs up on both sides and lasts throughout life'.

The domestic service lost its attractiveness when other employment opportunities arose and it was remarked that 'the young working girl of today prefers to become a Board School Mistress, a post-office clerk, a typewriter, a shop girl or a worker in a factory - anything rather than enter domestic service'. The 1851 Census showed that the majority of domestic servants were girls aged between fifteen and twenty-five. On the other hand, the majority of charwomen,

washerwomen, manglers and laundry-keepers were middle age and older. The needle was the principal employment for women in London. Thomas Hood in his '**Song of the Shirt**', 1844, drew the public's attention to the evils of sweated labour:

With fingers weary and worn,  
With eyelid heavy and red,  
A woman sat in unwomanly rags,  
Playing her needle and thread-  
Stitch! stitch! stitch!  
In poverty, hunger and dirt.  
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch  
She sang the "Song of the Shirt".

Work - work - work,  
Till the brain begins to swim;  
Work - work - work,  
Till the eyes are heavy and dim!  
Seam and gusset and band,  
Band and gusset and seam,  
Till over the buttons I fall asleep,  
And sew them on in a dream!

Oh, men with Sisters dear!  
Oh, men with Mothers and Wives!  
It is not linen you're wearing out,  
But human creatures' lives!

Stitch! stitch! stitch,



In poverty, hunger and dirt,  
Sewing at once, with a double thread,  
A Shroud as well as a Shirt...

Although women were excluded from underground working in mines in 1842 at least two hundred were found working underground in Welsh and some of them dressed as men.

Although employment opportunities increased greatly, women had no equal quality with men. Pay was lower and prospects for advancement more limited. The equal pay in the civil service was formally accepted in 1955. The weak trade union organisation was one of the reason of poor conditions of women workers. Margaret Bondfield, leader of the shop workers ( later she became Britain's first woman Cabinet Minister in 1929 ) wrote at the end of the century:

**'the largest proportion of women wage-earners do not organise... they look upon it as a temporary occupation to be superseded by marriage! They fail to see any need for bothering themselves about the wages and general conditions obtaining in their trade... Until girls are taught, independence and a trade... Women wage-earners in the aggregate will remain where they are today - outside the ranks of Trade Unionism'.**

## **The Reform Of Women's Legal Position And The Suffrage Question**

The legal status of women took three major forms: the rights of married women, the custody of children and divorce.

The Custody of Children Act of 1839 gave mothers certain limited rights to their children. The main provision was that an 'innocent' mother might have custody of any children up to the age of seven. But from 1886 the welfare of the child was made the determining factor in custody cases. The Divorce Act of 1857 secured certain property rights of women. A woman had a judicial separation or was granted a protection by her husband, she would have all the rights of an unmarried woman with respect to property. However, the main concern of the Act was to make divorce easier. By the 1860s there were 150 divorces a year, rising to 600 a year by 1890. The Married Women's Property Act of 1870 allowed women to retain their property or earnings which was got after marriage. Between 1857 & 1882 Married Women's Property Bills were introduced in Parliament. Feminists argued that women needed the vote in order to bring pressure on parliament to support their interests. Every year from 1869 Bill was introduced to give women the vote. Liberal backbenchers were friendly to the movement. At last women gained power.

#### **IVb) WOMEN GAINING POWER IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND**

Historians have more knowledge about the lives of Victorian women than about those in earlier centuries. In Victorian time society was more widely literate, thus, there are written materials such as newspapers, letters, diaries, books and novels give information of the time. During the 19th century Britain continued to change from a rural to an industrialized and urbanized society. Therefore, people's lifestyles and circumstances became more varied and complex. In terms of power, women's experiences were very mixed. Although there

was a woman on the English throne for most of the century, there was still opposition to the idea of women's public authority. As prosperity increased, families spent more money on home furnishing and household goods. Homes became more sumptuous and upholstered and women's fashion became more bulky and restricting. As a result of this, the idea of the fragile and '**womanly**' female took importance. Although women were seen passive and powerless in the 19th century society, there is evidence that many women rejected the constraints placed on them by the feminine ideal.

## **The Angel of the House**

Virginia Woolf, the novelist, grew up in the nineteenth century and when she began to write in the early twentieth century, she was haunted by the image of Victorian womanhood.

**'You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of the Angel of the House. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish... Almost every Victorian house had its angel. And when I came to write, the shadow of her wings fell upon the page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room'.** (Source : Virginia Woolf, '**A Speech to Professional Women**', given in 1931 and published in '**The Pargiters**', Hogarth Press, 1978)

## **A Manchester Woman**

Katherine Chorley, the middle class woman, describes life in a suburb of Manchester in the late nineteenth century. She tried to stretch people's faces while she was standing on a situation platform:



**'I could not sketch the ladies on the same plane as their husbands and fathers and sons because it would not come natural to put them on an equality. For the men were the money-lords; and since for almost every family the community values were fundamentally economic, it followed that their women were their dependants. They existed for their husbands 'and fathers' sake and their lives were shaped to please masculine vanity'. (Source : K.Chorley, Manchester Made Them , Faber & Faber, 1950)**

Many Victorian middle class women charitted. Philanthropy was seen as a suitable female occupation. Women visited the poor and sick people and joined **'Girls' Friendly Societies** which organized charitable projects.

Many women devoted themselves to improve the society. They were motivated by their radical Christian Faith. They believed in the equality of the sexes and rejected the traditional control placed on them by church; women began to share public life and had movements:

- Mary Carpenter set up orphanages and reform schools in Bristol.
- Annie Besant supported the Match Girls' Strike for better pay and campaigned for greater availability of bith control.
- Octavia Hill organized Housing Reform.
- Florence Nightingale made huge advancements in nursing and public health.
- Josephine Butler campaigned for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act which victimized female prostitutes.

## **Education And The Emancipation Of Women**

There were two important and obvious social revolutions in the nineteenth century. One of them was the growing emancipation of women and other was the gradual development of a state education system.

One of the major aim of Victorian women was to get equal schooling for both sex. Like Mary Wollstonecraft, they believed that education was the key in women's power. The absence of academic training kept women out of the professions. As a result of the educational reforms, many changes occurred in the nineteenth century.

### **Secondary Schools**

Two important girls' secondary schools were established in the nineteenth century: The North London Collegiate School for Ladies was founded in 1837 by Frances Buss and Cheltenham Ladies College was founded by Dorothea Beale in 1858. The middle class girls had lessons in these schools in the mornings and carried on domestic duties at home in the afternoons. But boys were sent away to public schools in order not to be interrupted.

It is clear that girls had more serious education. Some male gynaecologists and educationalists believed that energetic academic study would make the girls infertile because strenuous studying would interrupt their menstrual flow. There were also grave doubts about female intellectual capacities. Royal Commission of all male which was set up in 1864 to examine the state of education in public schools asked the question:

**‘Are girls capable of learning subjects like Latin and Mathematics?’**

## **The Aim Of Education**

Many women opposed further education for girls: **‘The aim of education is to fit children for the position of life which they are hereafter to occupy. Boys are to be sent out into the world, to buffet with its temptations, to mingle with bad and good, to govern and direct. The school is the type of life they are hereafter to lead. Girls are to dwell in quiet homes, amongst a few friends; to exercise a noiseless influence, to be submissive and retiring. There is no connection between the bustling mill-wheel life of a large school and that for which they are supposed to be preparing’.** (Source: Elizabeth Sewell, **‘Principles of Education’**, 1865).

## **Universities**

In the 1830s and 1840s women were admitted to London Colleges. Cambridge admitted women in 1871 and Oxford in 1879. In the 1890s Ellen Watson outdid her male contemporaries by getting the highest marks from math and mechanics at University College, London.

## **Employment**

Nursing, teaching, librarianship, clerical and secretarial jobs were for ladies. Most of these improvements in education directly affected only middle class girl. The number of educated women grew and women became active in public life. They were recognized as equal to men in other ways.





## **Marriage And Domestic Life**

Radical changes in the 1880s and 1890s gave women:

- the right to divorce
- the right to have custody of their children
- the right to inherit from a husband
- the right to own and to transfer property
- the right to have a personal savings account.

Technological advancements and legal reforms changed the domestic life: women gained new ideas about motherhood, childbirth and contraception.

## **Motherhood**

Medical technology and the new ideas about child psychology changed society's view of children and the nature of motherhood. In pre-industrial society, parenthood was to provide the materials for children. The father was the family's main economic provider. The mother was responsible for the children's development. Child-care manuals, such as '**The Wife's Handbook**' by Dr. Allbutt, became popular and widely read.

## **Childbirth**

Medical improvements and a better understanding the body's functions during pregnancy and birth gave mother control over their childbearing. More women knew the importance of adequate rest, a good diet during pregnancy and hygienic conditions for birth. As a result, fewer mother now died in childbirth.

## Contraception

Women began to gain control over their fertility. The development of contraceptive devices allowed women to regulate their pregnancies and to limit the number of children. In 1877 Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh were arrested and brought to trial for publishing and distributing Knowlton's, *Fruits of Philosophy*, a book that described birth control techniques.

## Working Class Women

The new concept of motherhood , the development of household appliances, wider knowledge of birth control and pregnancy affected only the middle classes. Working class women had little education whose time and energy were spent on feeding and clothing families. Women of the working class were experiencing power of a different kind. Although they worked very hard, poorer women did not suffer the powerlessness. In many ways they experienced greater independence and self-determination than middle class women. Working class women made equal contribution to their households than their middle class sisters. Men were providers and women were housewives. The division between home and workplace was less complete than in middle class families. Many poor women earned money by taking in other people's laundry and ironing or by housing lodgers.

A Victorian woman described her mother:

**'As our family increased and my father's wages remained stationary, it was necessary for my mother to earn money to help**

keep us in food and clothing ... A good father and husband up to a point he (Mrs.Smith's father) left responsibility of the whole family to my mother... the worry of all her liabilities and the continual grinding away at work for her own family and working outside her home at last undermined her once splendid constitution... My mother was everything to me. I always thought whatever she did or she said was sure to be right'.

## **Work And Trade Unions**

In 1841, 50% of all female workers in factories were under 20 years of age. Factory workers worked long hours in intense heat, poor light and poorly ventilated buildings. Their wages were poor and lower than males'.

When trade unions became legal from 1824, many working women joined unions. They had better conditions and better pay. In 1874 Emma Paterson formed the Women's Protective and Provident League to encourage the formation. The feminine political activity was spread with this league.

## **The Match Girls' Strike**

In 1888 Annie Besant published papers about the low wages of the female workers who worked eleven or twelve hours in a day. She organized a strike fund and persuaded the London Trades Council to intervene with the directors of Bryant & May. The match-girls won their case within a fortnight.



In the 1880s there were strikes amongst women workers. Working class women realized that their labour was their power; by going on strike they had made for generations, they influenced the decision-makers.

## **The Status Of Women**

John Stuart Mill had promised women that he would study for the women's vote. He lived with an active feminist, Harriet Taylor, who had written articles and pamphlet **'The Enfranchisement Of Women'**. He argued in order to improve the status of women. Her daughter, Helen Taylor, carried on the campaign as Mill did. In fact, the whole status of women was in question. Men did not want them to vote. There was a great deal of confusion over the nature of women. There was a view that women did not work but it took no account because over half the women in the country worked and always worked. By 1896 there were 142,000 women in trade unions who worked in the textile industries. Throughout the following decade, the women were supported in the Liberal Party, both in and out of Parliament. Seventeen Major Societies became the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Its chief aim was to gain the vote for women.

# **TIMELINE**

## **NINETEENTH CENTURY 1800 & 1900**

### **Women's Power**

- \* Queen Victoria reigns for most of century.
- \* Significant changes to marriage and property laws in 1880s and 1890s.
- \* First girls' secondary schools and women's colleges established.
- \* Teaching, clerical and nursing professions opened to women.
- \* Women active in trade unions.
- \* Middle-class women administer charity organisations.

### **Women's Powerlessness**

- \* Women denied leadership in the church.
- \* Prostitution common among working class women and girls.
- \* Women factory workers employed in poor conditions for low wages.
- \* Middle class women restricted by pressures of "respectability".

### **Additional Points**

- \* Feminine ideal continues to influence the middle classes.
- \* Improved plumbing and household appliances.
- \* Some improvements in pre-and post-natal care.
- \* Chloroform discovered as pain relief for childbirth. (1847)
- \* Development of contraceptive devices.

## Significant Events

- 1801 - Union with Ireland
- 1815 - Battle of Waterloo and end of French Wars
- 1825 - Stockton & Darlington Railway opens
- 1837 - Accession of Queen Victoria
- 1859 - Darwin publishes 'Origin of Species'
- 1888 - Bryant & May match -girls' strike



## V) THE IMPACT OF JOSEPHINE BUTLER, OCTAVIA HILL AND FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE ON THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

In 1860, Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill and Florence Nightingale became prominent figures whose policies and activities shaped national life. These three women were England's great nineteenth century pioneers of social reform. In an era when most women were prisoned to the kitchen, these three moved confidently into positions of world leadership. They had different view about social policies who attributed their social vision to their religious faith.

These three women were the centre of innovations and they were commented on by others. For example, George Frederick Watts had talked about Josephine Butler that she was the only woman who was very solemn and worked very attentively at the time. Octavia Hill was described by David Owen as one of the **'classic monuments of Victorian philanthropy'**. And Sir Reginald Rowe commented about Octavia Hill that **'I doubt if in the field of human service there has ever been any other women who has sown seeds from which so much has grown and is still growing'**. Florence Nightingale was given five pages in **'The Dictionary of National Biography'** as **'the Lady with the Deadly Lampshade'**. As it is seen these three important women had taken the interest of the people and were praised.

Josephine Butler struggled for the repeal of the Contagious Disease Act which victimized female prostitutes. She fought for the civil rights

of women and became the leader of an international alliance. On the other hand, in some ways she was conservative. While she did much for the advancement and freedom and poverty of women, she also placed women as home-maker, wife and mother. While she believed that votes had to be given to women, she was distressed by the suffragists' methods. She believed that women should be given the rights to vote and university education. During her life, Butler campaigned for women and she encountered male hostility.

Octavia Hill was the leader of the British movement which resulted in the foundation of the National Trust Beauty. She was also a housing reformer whose methods of housing-project were imitated in Great Britain, in Europe and in the United States. As a founder of National Trust Beauty and a great conservationist she helped for the British people. She was a teacher, college administrator, member of the Poor Law Board and the Ecclesiastical Commission who worked for the basic rights of women. Hill was greatly influenced by John Ruskin whom she met him in 1853. She established the first of her housing projects in a slum area of St. Marylebone borough, London in 1864. The next year she worked for the direction of other housing projects. Later in 1884 she was put in charge of property in Southwark, London where she encouraged other women to manage mass housing. In 1869 she founded the Charity Organisation Society to examine the living conditions and to solve the problems of poor.

Florence Nightingale was the first nurse who established a training school for nurses and also pioneered work in the use of statistical analysis and played an important role in the reform of medical practice and public health. Sebastopol, the Russian naval port on the Black Sea,



was captured and many soldiers died in the trenches and in the hospitals. F.Nightingale took the task of nursing of the sick at Scutari Hospital in 1854. From the diary of F.Nightingale written on 7 July 1846 before she began nursing:

**‘What is my business in this world and what I have done in the last fortnight? I have read ‘The Daughter at Home’ to Father and two chapters of Mackintosh; a volume of Sybil to Mama. Learnt seven tunes by heart. Written various letters. Ridden with Papa. Paid eight visits. Done company. And that is all’.** She said that she wished to make a better life for women but she also said that she was **‘brutally indifferent’** to the rights of her own sex. She signed the petition for women's suffrage and gave encouragement to women who wanted to be doctors. She was honest in saying that her self-centredness, her difficulty in understanding other women and their needs.

These three women analysed the needs of Great Britain in the light of the Christian faith. While these three brought great energies to the universal social problems, other citizens searched the horizon for portents. They linked their ideas with a world view, Christianity. These leaders had dilemma with the issue of women's right. As Christianity they insisted on the rights of the powerless. They were encouraged to develop these talents by a Christianity with the ideal of a liberated humanity. A society between rich and poor, male and female had been healed by a God of justice. As social reformers they brought both practical energies and single-mindedness of the visionary to their work: they wanted to build the New Jerusalem. They wanted to be transcend to find an authentic life for themselves. Although in some



ways they diverged from the tenets of Orthodoxy, their origin was in Christianity. Josephine Butler was an Anglican of a Low-Church, evangelical bent. Octavia Hill was a Unitarian who adopted the social concerns of the Christian Socialists. Florence Nightingale developed ideas on the nature of God according to Early Church belief. These views appear in their writings. For example, Josephine Butler wrote biographies of two religious figures, St. Catherine of Siena and Jean Frederick Oberlin and many pamphlets which should be read as sermons. In her letters Octavia Hill confronts her friends and relatives with her reflections on theology. Florence Nightingale worked and believed in faith. Butler and Hill thought that their views were original and only important for themselves. Nightingale admitted that in her 800 pages of **'Suggestions for Thought'**, had got muddled.

They believed that right thought would bring right action. Thus, they were interested in religious thought. They wished to live a life that was faithful, not to wish to solve the philosophical questions which humanity thought hard and deeply from the beginning. These social reformers' lives were shaped and directed by their theology. They felt their faith was shaped by their experience and their psychological development was informed by faith.

All these three women were remarkable from the beginning. Nightingale and Hill gave hope to feminists and social reformers on the continent. **'Notes on Nursing'** had a large sale. **'Homes of the London Poor'** was translated into German. Workers came from Holland and Sweden in order to get Hill's ideas. It had provided a model for the woman. In the Crimean War the French nurses took F. Nightingale as a model.

In Continental Society women were not seen as policy-makers. They were given rights in only religious communities. In Britain this was more stable and more accommodating. But this view was changed with these three women.

Women were considered as modest, weak, emotional, irrational, submissive and dependent, where as men were strong, aggressive, courageous, independent, rational, competent, decisive. There were many studyings to change this view. These three women were the leaders of the communities who wanted to show the power of women.

The battle between the sexes was coming to an end.

Butler describes the male instinct as a female gift for compassion. Hill was against this idea. Nightingale advocated the complementary relation of marriage partners. All three had different view but placed woman as mother. They thought that maternal instinct must be showed to the world at large. Butler believed that the social reform is only possible with female instinct. Hill attributed much of her ability to her maternal nature. Nightingale was protector of women. They drew radical conclusion from the deification of motherhood. They thought that the maternal nature of women could be in two very different directions. It helped to create a society that was based on male and female which hidden woman to home and subjected her to man's rule. Yet the mother is a ruler in governing the child.

Josephine Butler at her most aggressive continued to think of herself as a feminine woman. On the other hand, Octavia Hill enjoyed being called 'Loke, my brother' by her sisters. Florence Nightingale weakened version of womanhood that she saw around her. First, they

give women and men equal opportunity. Then, they said men and women will not find their identity through imitating others. Butler, Hill and Nightingale showed that women could work in the world as effectively as men.



## VI) CONCLUSION

### THE ENGLISH WOMAN

The image of the English woman is elusive in this period of the construction and redefinition of Englishness. The classic English man of the period was held to combine certain qualities, including leadership, courage, justice and honour which were defined as 'English'. He has no exact female equivalent. The qualities of the perfect English woman were publicly discussed but they were not generally perceived as being specifically English. They had domestic and maternal qualities.

With the emergence of feminism and of the 'new woman' in this period, however, the conventional conception of female role faced a stronger challenge than did prevailing notions of the male role. The challenge of alternative conceptions of womanhood grew so strong as the period went on that the image of the ideal English woman had to adapt to accommodate them. It should be stressed that women themselves created these alternatives.

Nevertheless the English woman remains a more shadowy figure than the English man because women were believed to possess transnational qualities. Nationality played a more significant role in the redefinition of masculinity as it emerged in later nineteenth century than in that of femininity. One of the distinctions between male and female was that the concept of nationality was almost always on the male side of the divide. Women had no fixed nationality. They were made to adopt of their husband. On marriage to a foreigner they lost

their English status and its accompanying rights.

As a homemaker a woman is expected to exert moral and spiritual influence over the male members of the family and so affect their actions in the outside world. Ruskin's '**Of Queens Gardens**' which contains the classic statement of the nineteenth century vision of home:

This is the true nature of home-it is the place of peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division. In so far it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold it ceases to be a home; it is then only a part of the outer world which you have roofed over and lighted a fire in.

In the field of biology Patrick Geddes published '**The Evolution of Sex**' in 1889. He identified differences in temperament between male and female which he believed to derive from a basic difference in celt metabolism. Like Spencer, Geddes did not present woman as inferior to men. He believed that they were equal but just as certainly '**different**' and that no amount of activity by women's would alter.

Women's achievement in education, sport and politics, even motoring, showed what women could do, yet the volume still insisted that the most important role for an English woman is in '**the English Home**'. But perfection still eluded English wives and mothers. They were criticized for being a better friend of her husband than of her children.

All English women were being measured against an even more exacting standard than before. Domestic perfection had to be combined with some of the independence and adventurousness of the new women.



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