

The Restrained Aspirations of George Eliot's heroine in *The Mill on the Floss*

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The mere name George Eliot raises a question whether her text should be read by a male author or female. What made Mary Ann Evans to turn as George Eliot? Why her heroines are not allowed to step out of typicality when Mary Ann Evans enjoyed the liberty of living according to her wish. The powerful depiction of her heroines is ending their life either in death or in wedding. Why? The ultimate answer for all the questions will be her concern to satisfy her contemporary society. It's a pathetic position for women writers in the mid 19th century to surrender them to attain recognition more than enjoying the liberty to write as they wish.

Eliot is accused by several critics for making Adam Bede, Hetty Sorrel, Maggie and Dorothea suffer and not making them enjoy the aspirations to its brim. Even most of her titles carry the names of the places or some other names seen in the novel more than the names of the female protagonists. The 19th century realism is depicted clearly in the ending of her novels.

Eliot's female characters mainly her heroines are filled with remarkable aspirations but they are not allowed to set out conventions. Dorothea in *Middlemarch* nor Maggie in *Mill on the Floss* are powerfully portrayed with aspirations but they disappoint the readers towards the end. They both lack liberty to perform what they aspire. What happened to their aspirations at the end remains a question and put readers into disappointment. Why they are not allowed to enjoy the liberty to live their life against society's convention when Eliot herself enjoyed like publishing articles, leading an independent life and allowing herself in a living together relationship.

Maggie Tulliver in *Mill on the Floss* is completely different from other female characters. When other women characters enjoyed doing house chores Maggie designed her life and strengthened her aspirations in all the ways. She troubles herself with question: Why I am not allowed to take my education when my brother Tom enjoys? She loves to embrace books than adjusting house chores. Gaining knowledge is worth for her more than knitting and spinning. When Lucy confines within conventions Maggie steps out as governess the rarest of the age. She has confrontations against normal womanhood. But she doesn't have the courage to marry Stephen who is engaged to Lucy but adored Maggie. In the name of morality her aspiration is confined. She undergoes so many problems because Eliot allows her to step so far outside typicality but at the end forces her to accept death. Maggie longs for approval. Her emotional instability and disastrous deviations lead to trials and tribulations but only through this she discovers the reality of life and establishes a lasting union with abiding values. She is appreciated for her act of renunciation but what happened to her aspirations. When the readers are expecting a great change in the life of Maggie, the devastating moment of seeing Maggie drowned in the flood lays total disappointment to the female society.

The most expected aspirated female protagonist is forced to accept death than being crowned with strong aspirations.

Like Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* plays an effective role. Dorothea with all over respects to her womanliness, her generosity, her philanthropy, her self-sacrificing spirit, her sense of justice, etc turn her a woman who equals the traits of belated Theresa.

Dorothea possesses certain good qualities such as planning cottages for better living of the poor people, contributing to the new hospital in order to improve the methods to treat diseases, etc portray her a powerful female protagonist with appreciative qualities imbibe with powerful aspirations. She belongs to a group of great spirits. As the novel goes forward, Dorothea moves with her own ideas. When her sister cares for jewellery, Dorothea is carefully designed with charity disposition. But in the end she is forced to accept wedding. What happens to her noble dispositions and ideologies that are waiting to project her a woman who

steps out typicality and embraces originality without minding out society? The novel *Middlemarch* is conventional enough than the death of Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*.

Anyone who reads Maggie will start cherishing her for her spirit, passion to learn, eagerness to step outside typicality and competing emotion. She is assaulted emotionally, sexually, physically and intellectually. When she was trying to bring out her potentiality, every now and then she was pulled back. She tries to equalize herself with her brother. Reads, aspires to educate herself, longs for school, but when she tries to discover herself she was not supported by anyone.

Rachel Vorona Cote says

A heroine like Maggie Tulliver, one who, over the course of her life, is considered too clever and impetuous and exuberant, commits the gravest of crimes: she occupies space explicitly denied to her. Maggie emotes with lavish immoderation; reads everything her brother does, and exponentially more; and, as a child, thwarts attempts to render her a dainty specimen of girlhood.

Maggie is extremely sensitive and emotional. She always craves to be loved and to love others. She loves her brother Tom and follows him wherever he goes. Eliot introduces as a girl with lots of love and affection. The transformation takes place slowly and reaches its peak at the end. Maggie is enriched with poetic imagination. She sees lofty things around even in trivial things. She should understand mysterious message in the nature. When other Victorian women are busy in trivial things, Maggie experiences greater aspects in all. Her aspirations are very strong but often restrained by her society even by her mother and brother.

When her mother concentrates on household and craft works Maggie love books and music. After Mr. Tulliver's bankruptcy, the family members were concentrating on money whereas Maggie longs for music and books. Thus her love for music is revealed clearly in order to show her as a charming heroine who has the capacity to love everything beyond ordinary.

Maggie is often dominated by the influence of her society. Eliot allows Maggie to step so far outside typicality but at the same time blocks her liberty. Her life is more cruelly restricted and her ambitions are more thoroughly severed.

The relationship between Tom and Maggie itself is highly frustrating. Tom constantly dominates Maggie. It is Maggie who always begs Tom. Whenever there happens a quarrel between them, it is Maggie who apologises first. Tom is always harsh and cruel towards her. He is very authoritative and dominates Maggie. The readers will get questions often about why Eliot allows Tom to dominate Maggie always. Certain incidents show Tom constantly dominates Maggie. When they grow up Tom refuses to allow Maggie to live with him. He misunderstands Maggie and pushes her out from his house. Even though Maggie is intellectual and courageous than Tom, Eliot never allows her to dominate Tom. In the name of affection she makes Maggie accept whatever Tom does to her.

Maggie is highly romantic and different than other women characters. She visits the gypsy colony and reveals her interest to know things. Eliot represents her heroine as a powerful character who has the courage to live her life. Here Eliot also stresses the view that Maggie wishes to lead a different life. She is also different from other female characters who live under conventions and limitations. For instance, when Mrs. Glegg goes to the extent of finding fault with Mr. Tulliver, Maggie just like a grown up girl flares up and says to her aunt

‘why do you come, then, talking and interfering with us and scolding us if you don't mean to do anything to help my poor mother’

This particular incident shows Maggie as a character who is different from other conventional oriented female characters like her mother Mrs. Tulliver. Maggie has started questioning anything when Mrs. Tulliver simply accepts anything that forced upon her. But at the same time, Maggie is misunderstood by her society. She is not crowned for her boldness. When she worries about her father's problem and tries to do something to save her family. She lacks support and encouragement. Mrs. Tulliver wishes her daughter should learn the domestic work instead of being an intellectual girl. Maggie wishes to do so many things but she is not allowed to step out from conventions.

When Maggie wishes to go to school education like Tom, she is not allowed. Mr. Tulliver plainly says that it is not necessary to educate girl children. But Maggie has her own urge to learn and reads too many books which taught her life.

Maggie is completely different from her society. The society at St.Oggs treats as a symbol of the Victorian society at large. This story is restrained, repressive, brutal and graceless. Their chief concern is money Mrs. Tulliver is a materialist. She hears of her husband's bankruptcy, she feels for her property than for her husband. Maggie lives, grows and matures in this brutal environment. Maggie is the victim of it. Her aspirations are not revealed or accepted because of this repressive environment.

Eliot troubles Maggie in order to show the limits given to the female society. She depicts how Maggie is tortured by stereotypical expectations. Maggie's life is more cruelly restricted, her ambitions more thoroughly frustrated than her brother. The ending to the novel has a great deal of commentary, interpretation and disappointment. Eliot aims to depict realism in her novel and this forces her to end her novel in the death of Maggie and Tom. Marriage is not possible here and so death ends the novel. Eliot could have given a positive ending but cares for the Victorian society more than Maggie. Realism is important for her more than the aspirations of Maggie. She is not allowed to step out typicality eventhough Eliot enjoys that in her personal life. Eliot refuses to allow Maggie to do what she did in real life, like publishing articles, leading an independent existence and finally live with a man whom she could not marry.

Early nineteenth century expects that a woman can complete her life only with marriage. In Maggie's case, marriage is not possible and so she dies. Her novel realistically presents the life of Warwickshire where women were not allowed to think or act freely. The restrained aspirations of Eliot's Maggie shows that her heroine is not allowed to act within limitations of nineteenth century. Maggie's aspiration are restrained completely by Eliot to reveal herself as a writer who lies between two position that is to reveal herself as a realistic writer than a feministic writer by ending her novel 'The Mill on the Floss'. This reveals that Eliot's contemporary society had been dominated by forces and concepts against freedom of women and their aspirations.

Reference

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