



Women in Victorian Era

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Abstract : Victorian era literature was characterized by depiction of the mundane life of people. This era introduced the concept of separate spheres for men and women. Women's issues were largely depicted in the Victorian novels. Women faced patriarchal victimization and this led to the intense suffering, both physical and psychological.

Keywords: Victorian, Patriarchy, Exploitation, Gender, Innocence, System, Social Structure, Independence.

I. INTRODUCTION

Victorian era literature was characterized by depiction of the daily life of people, their hard lives, interests, grievances and problems. It often presented varied social classes of people rather than just the aristocracy. It was meant for more than just entertainment and often had a morale purpose. Most of the writers exalted a purely ideal life. It was during the Victorian period that the concept of separate spheres for men and women were incorporated. These spheres are public to men and private or family to women. The woman has her own domain, which is the house and she is the mother, the housewife and the devoted servant. This philosophy of the distinguishing between men and women is determined by gender. Men are competitive, assertive and materialistic, while women are devout, pure, tender and sacrificial. Another factor affecting women's rights in the Victorian era was sexual violence and abuse. The woman was a victim of sexual abuse or marital rape. Another problem faced by Victorian women was prostitution and the economic situation of middle-class women. Poor working conditions and underemployment forced thousands of women into prostitution which became increasingly professional in the nineteenth century. Women's issues in the Victorian era were broadly related to separate sphere, prostitution, sex and marriage, exploitation, law, suffrage, transgression, crime, underemployment and poor economic conditions.

Victorian men expected femininity and innocence from women Charles Petrie in his essay "*Victorian Women Expected to be Idle and Ignorant*", explains exactly what Victorian men wanted, "Innocence was what he demanded from the girls of his class, and they must not only be innocent but also give the outward impression of being innocent. White muslin, typical of virginal purity, clothes many a heroine with delicate shades of blue and pink next in popularity. The stamp of masculine approval was placed upon ignorance of the world, meekness, lack of opinions, general helplessness, and weakness; in short, recognition of female inferiority to the male". (Page-184) Walby in her book entitled "Theorizing Patriarchy" states that "Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women"(Page-20). Patriarchy is defined as a long lasting and continuously transforming social structure in which men dominate women and in this position they exploit women, which manifests in social, economic, political, and cultural practices, in both the private and public spheres.

With the advent of the Industrial Age, Victorian women saw new opportunities for themselves. The expanding capitalist culture heralds new avenues of discovery. With new found confidence in themselves, Victorian women dared to take on new adventures to end their long life enslaved by patriarchy. The progressive development of the infrastructure has provided opportunities for women to receive an education. The growing number of girls' boarding schools and universities heralded in a new era in their education. This contributed to the psychological and intellectual awakening of Victorian women.

Victorian women's awareness of their own potential and capabilities helped them not only to awaken their spirit but also to decipher the hegemonic designs of Victorian patriarchy. They understood the politics involved in feminine ideal. Education not only broadened their horizon but also equipped them with skills to perform official duties effectively. In the late nineteenth century, women held industrial management position. Changing status in the workplace led to women's economic independence. In a developing capitalist society, they, as consumers were no longer just the shackles of the family system.

References:

1. Petrie, Charles. "Victorian Women Expected to be Idle and Ignorant". Victorian England. Edited. Clarice Swisher. San Deigo: Green Heaven Press Inc, 2000
2. Walby, Silvia. "Theorizing Patriarchy". London: Basil Black Well, Oxford, 1990.