

## 19th Century or Victorian women Novelists

The women novelists came into limelight in the 18th Century. They made their importance felt in the department of Domestic and Gothic fiction. Richardson and Sterne investigated the inner recesses of human heart and sensibility and Fielding and Smollett made the novel reflect the broad and hilarious life of the street and the inns. But, the 18th Century women novelists restrained themselves in the depiction of domestic life. They created domestic fiction which had to blossom in all its maturity in the hands of the women novelists of the Victorian age. The plant of the domestic fiction was nourished in the 18th century that yielded fruits in the Victorian era.

The first Victorian woman novelist who attracts our attention is Charlotte Brontë. She is the first subjective novelist, the ancestor of James Joyce and all the historians of the private consciousness. As Thackeray was the first to make the novel the vehicle of a conscious criticism of life, Brontë is the first to make it vehicle of personal revelation. 'Jane Eyre', 'Villette', 'The Professor' and 'Shirley' are her important novels. She is fertile in incidents, vigorous in narrations and vivid in scenes. Her prose flies to its mark with an arrow's beautiful impetus and precision. The fire of life burns <sup>strongly</sup> in her novels.

Next to Charlotte Brontë is Emily Brontë. She is a romantic novelist. Her fame mainly rests on 'Wuthering Heights', in which the characters are the personified powers that stormed in Emily's own being. Emily has presented a new conception of woman of vital strength and passionate feelings. Mrs. Gaskell is another important novelist of this age. She is an industrial reformer. For the first time, she has reflected the industrial and economic problems. She realistically presents the condition of the labouring classes in the new cities of the Industrial

North. Her best novel is 'Granford'. It shows the repercussions of Big Business in two small sister-towns. A bank fails and they are ruined. Her genius is so purely feminine that she excludes the very masculine qualities of thought and feeling. She does not build story round a central idea like Meredith. She neither describes the intellectual characters. In short, if Brontë's apply romantic method in their novel, Gaskell adopts the realistic method of Jane Austen. But, she lays stress on emotional life of her characters.

George Eliot is another important novelist of the Victorian Era. She is a great preacher and moraliser. As Dickens paints the city streets and Thackeray delineates the vanities of Society, George Eliot depicts the country life in England. Above all, she is a reflective humourist. She has written a number of representative novels. 'Scene of clerical life', 'Silas Marner' and 'Middlemarch' to name a few.

Of course, George Eliot is the last great name among the women novelists of the Era. But there are also many other novelists who achieved great popularity. Miss. Healy Wood is a sentimental novelist. Her fame rests on 'East Lynne'. Mrs. Craik is also a sentimental novelist whose 'John Halifax Gentleman' is a grand success in its tear compelling quality. Mrs. Oliphant has been a promising novelist, but she has written novels with caring for their quality. M.E. Brodwin also deserves applause. 'Two little wooden shoes' of Mrs. Ouida has a fresh picturesque charm. She is adept in depicting real passion and her skill in presenting certain moods of sexual emotion is unrivalled.

Thus, we see that the Victorian age is flooded with women novelists. Some of them, like George Eliot

and Charlotte Brontë can sit with Dickens and Thackeray  
In the 18th Century Jane Austen stands in the vanguard  
and in the 19th Century George Eliot remains in the  
forefront.