T.C.

ATILIM UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

ENGLISH CULTURE AND LITERATURE DOCTORAL PROGRAM

A FOUCAULDIAN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE AND GENDER SUBJECTIVITY IN THE LATE VICTORIAN NOVELS

Dissertation

Shah Mir

Ankara – 2021

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Thesis Advisor

Prof. Dr. Belgin Elbir

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ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis titled “A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Marriage and Gender Subjectivity in the Late Victorian Novels” and prepared by Shah MIR meets with the committee’s approval unanimously as Dissertation in the field of English Culture and Literature following the successful defence conducted in 13/12/2021.

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I accept and acknowledge that I have prepared this thesis study, prepared in line with the Thesis Writing Guidelines of Atılım University Graduate School of Social Sciences;

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- I hereby present a unique study.

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13/12/2021

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Shah MIR

ÖZ

MIR, Shah. Geç Viktorya Dönemi Romanlarında Evlilik ve Cinsiyet Öznelliği Söylemlerinin Foucaultcu Söylem Analizi Yöntemiyle İncelenmesi, Doktora Tezi, Ankara, 2021.

Bu tez, 19. yüzyılın sonlarına ait Viktorya dönemi romanlarında toplumsal cinsiyet öznelliği ve evlilik üzerine olan söylemleri incelemektedir. Araştırma için seçilen romanlar, Henry James'in *The Portrait of a Lady*, George Gissing'in *The Odd Women* ve Thomas Hardy'nin *Jude the Obscure* adlı romanlarıdır. Çalışma, Michel Foucault'nun söylem analizi yöntemi aracılığıyla toplumsal cinsiyet öznelliği ve evlilik üzerine söylem inşa biçimlerini incelemektedir. Bu inceleme, cinsiyet söylemi üzerine söylemlerin epistemik çevre içinde nasıl inşa edildiğini ve sürdürüldüğünü inceleyen Carla Willig tarafından tasarlanan altı aşamalı bir analitik çerçeve bağlamındada yapılmaktadır. Bu tez ayrıca, üç romanı, söylemsel ortamlar açısından karşılaştırmakta ve yazarların bu söylemlere direnip direnmediğini araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, Foucaultcu söylem analizini kullanarak, toplumsal cinsiyet söylemlerinin değişen dinamiklerinden etkilenen söylem ve toplumsal cinsiyet öznelliği kavramlarının romanlarda nasıl temsil edildiğini irdelemekte ve Viktorya dönemi evlilik kurumu içindeki toplumsal cinsiyet öznelliğinin, bireysel öznelerin toplumsal cinsiyet ve evlilik konusundaki yerleşik söylemlerden kurtulabilmeleri için uygun alanları nasıl etkilediğini araştırmaktadır. Çalışmanın bulguları, belirli bir söylem epistemasının yakından incelenmesinin, egemen söylemlerin düzenleyici gücünün kurucu öğelerini analiz ederek öznellik tarzlarını ortaya çıkarabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, çalışma mekanizmalarını anlamaya yönelik bilinçli bir girişim, belirli epistemeler içinde söylem inşasını incelemeyi hedefleyen yeni çalışmalar için yeni yollar açabilir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Cinsiyet Öznelliği, Söylemsel Pratikler, Viktorya Döneminde Evlilik, Episteme, Foucaultcu.

ABSTRACT

MIR, Shah. A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Marriage and Gender Subjectivity in the Late Victorian Novels., PhD Thesis, Ankara, 2021.

This thesis examines discourses on marriage gender and subjectivity in Victorian novels of late nineteenth century. The novels selected for the research are Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*, George Gissing's *The Odd Women* and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. The study analyses modes of discourse construction on gender subjectivity and marriage through Michel Foucault's technique of discourse analysis. This explicatory process is aided by a six-stage analytical framework devised by Carla Willig that examines how discourses on gender are constructed and sustained within the epistemic environment of the late Victorian period. This thesis also compares the three novels through mapping their discursive environments and investigates if the authors resist or sustain those discourses. The work uses Foucauldian discourse analysis and builds upon his concepts of discourse and gender subjectivity as catalysts for the shifting dynamics of gender discourses, as validated by narratives of power and knowledge. It investigates if gender subjectivity within the Victorian institution of marriage close spaces for individual subjects to break free of deeply entrenched discourses on gender and marriage. The findings of the study reveal that a close examination of a particular discourse episteme can unearth modes of subjectivity through analyzing the constituent elements of regulatory power of dominant discourses. Moreover, a conscious undertaking aimed at understanding the working mechanisms can open new avenues for fresh studies targeted at the examination of discourse construction within historical epistemes.

Keywords: Gender Subjectivity, Discursive Practices, Victorian Marriage, Episteme, Foucauldian

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the dissertation is to present a detailed reading of discourses of marriage and gender subjectivity in late Victorian fiction. The thesis attempts to explicate discourses around marriage and construction of gender identities in three late Victorian novels i.e., *The Portrait of Lady* (1880-1881) by Henry James *The Odd Women* (1893) by George Gissing and Thomas Hardy's *Jude The Obscure* (1896). It examines the dynamics of marriage in the last two decades of Victorian England as portrayed in the chosen novels. This thesis studies the texts as narratives of gender roles and identity construction in the late Victorian period as viewed through a modern theoretical perspective. The study examines coexisting discursive practices of late 19th Century England through an analytical model that combines Foucauldian discourse analysis along with the investigative tools offered by a six-stage methodological framework devised by Carla Willig. Prof Willig specializes in discourse analysis and as a Professor of psychology studies the relationship of subjective experience and discourse. She is mainly interested in developing research methodologies that serve to address epistemological questions with regard to discourse models (Flick xxiii). Her model of Foucauldian discourse analysis is particularly suited to the study as it provides a fresh perspective towards the explication of discourses on marriage and gender subjectivity and understanding the interplay of discursive practices that serve as disciplining agents for the construction of discourses.

The choice for a Foucauldian analytical approach is oriented in its scope for explicating the discourses of marriage and gender through the mapping of the discursive practices. Here, a discursive practice combines a broader system of rules that governs the production of statements at a particular historical period i.e. episteme. It is this complex process of rules production that finally determines as to what can and cannot be said within the time period but also what is possible to say, as subjects within a historical period, derive that knowledge and truth sources through that complex web of discourses which they are themselves a product of. They self-censor and regulate within those discursive practices. This is examined in detail in the subsequent conceptual framework chapter of this thesis. A Foucauldian analytical framework, therefore, aids in deciphering the ways in which these rules are formed. The study at hand utilizes a Foucauldian lens to

understand how marriage and gender subjectivity are influenced by dominant discourses interwoven in the texts from the three selected novels. It also notes how the characters' gender subjectivity is formed in the cauldron of the prevalent discursive environment of the late Victorian period. This approach is crucial for a deeper understanding of the mechanics at play, and the research is therefore aimed at yielding greater insight into the operations of the dynamics of discourse and how their symbiotically structured space affects the linear development of discourses. It is examined from the initial construction of complex systems of rules that govern gender dynamics and control ideological makeup in the characters so analyzed. As we get to realize how discourses within a given epistemic environment determine and influence character subjectivity, and their orientation for action, it can equip readers to review their ontological positions as free human agents. This recognition of discourse dynamics can prove vital in reviewing of notions on gender divisions and how discourses can govern ideological perspectives.

Foucauldian discourse bears a close theoretical affinity with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which is defined as 'the flow of knowledge, and/or all societal knowledge stored throughout all time which determines individual and collective doing and/or formative action that shapes society, thus exercising power' (Wodak and Meyer 34). critical discourse analysis is essentially an interdisciplinary field as it coopts other disciplines i.e., linguistics, Semiotics, and cultural studies to gain deeper insights into the formation and validity of discourses that have consequences for power relations and knowledge production (Wodak, 11). Norman Fairclough's take on Foucauldian discourse in his *Discourse and Social Change* helps to merge it closer with CDA as the former credits discursive relations as a catalyst, that not only seeks to sustain and reproduce social reality, but also reconstitute gender relations and ideas of subject, knowledge, and power relations (19). While on the other hand, Foucauldian discourse attempts to untangle the very building blocks of discourses, as understood in the above sense, by challenging notions of 'knowledge', 'power' and the individual as the subject. In Foucauldian ideology, discourse can be confronted, refigured, and then set to motion once more with different formative elements for power and knowledge dynamics as understood erstwhile. The individual plays a key role in this process by a conscious assertion of subjective independence. Therefore Foucauldian discourse grants a degree of freedom and subjective

volition in contrast to accepting a set of material conditions as fait accompli. Critical discourse analysis regards gender subjectivity as a socio-cultural, historical, and discursive construct, while Foucault's analytical tools examine discourses in their select episteme as complex systems of knowledge where subjectivity can be reconfigured. This ability to reconfigure the constitutive elements of the subject forming process, endows Foucauldian discourse analysis with the ability to open avenues for greater individual freedom. Furthermore, it allows for possibilities of resistance in the face of entrenched ideological hold. This way, any form of resistance when exercised emerges as a deliberate act to counter ideological authority.

Foucauldian discourse becomes especially crucial for the examination of our texts as it considers dominant structures within social and cultural settings that determine gender orientations and subjectivity in the characters through their symbiotic connection with structures of power. This in turn helps to discover ideologies that feed into the discursive struggle in the characters of the novels. The self-sustaining force of ideological structures through their entrenched social institutions influence how characters come to terms with their specific social realities. Thus, the shaping of gender subjectivity directly affects how the characters navigate their myriad life situations and matrimonial commitments. Therefore, Foucauldian discourse seeks to explore the specificity of gender orientations and why or how gender subjectivities produce conflicting discourses. The investigation of the constituent parts of discursive practices can facilitate in bringing to the fore, conflicting subjective positions that individual characters employ. Additionally, Foucauldian discourse puts emphasis on the subtle and dynamic nature of the way discourse is produced, whereby the interconnectivity of the process in one constituent part has bearing upon the outcomes in the other. This interconnectivity of discourse dynamics is underscored by Foucault is his statement that 'discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle' (*The Order of the Discourse* 53).

As far as the analytical process is concerned, it is as follows. In the first stage of the analysis, discourses on marriage and gender subjectivity are studied and the mode of representations are recorded. This is achieved through the examination of the chosen texts in line with the research objectives. This is followed by how the given mode of

representation is influenced by the dominant narratives of the time period under investigation. Finally, the study undertakes to analyze as to what extent the authors resist and sustain the discourses in their respective works. The use of Foucauldian theoretical framework sets it apart from mainstream discourse studies as it does not limit the understanding of discourse as an instance of language use alone. Foucauldian discourse analysis encompasses a wider system of rules that make discourse possible in the first instance. Foucauldian discourse also analyses their relationship with the episteme of the time which underpins the basis that chains or liberates the voice of a period and its tacit codes for gender conduct. The close relationship of the author with his text plays a key role in gaining the right perspective on the dynamics of discourses. Authors not only mirror the society of the historical period that they are a part of, but they are also in turn shaped or controlled by the discursive practices of the episteme. They are compelled to engage the discourses available at the time and the characters are therefore woven into the texts through those means allowed by the discursive practice.

The three novels selected for the thesis are all from late 19th century. Seen in its historical context, the women's movement figured prominently at the time and authors then produced works inspired from this movement writing on the themes around gender equality and feminine empowerment through greater social political engagement in the arenas of power. These novels involve analogous themes and share certain similarities that make them ideal for the study at hand. For instance, all three novels have strong female protagonists who set out with a separate set of objectives, but by the end, they are apparently unable to live up to their individual ideals. The resistance that they face is not always apparent. The forces that thwart their goals are subtle and may generate from their own consciousness in conformity with the invisible forces of dominant discourses that define and limit their subjectivity. A closer examination of the texts helps to unravel as to how the forces that shape discourses get formed. The chosen analytical model moves systematically from considering the mechanisms of discourse production to their wider influence in forming the subjectivities of the characters in the novels under examination.

Henry James's Isabela Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880-81) is first introduced as someone with a broad imagination brimming with individual inspiration. She comes across to the reader as keyed up to exploring and experiencing the world on her own terms. The is underscored prominently in her portrayal in the novel. Early in the book, her sister Lillian notes she has been very conscious of her independence, and later in the book Isabel herself reminds Ralph Touchett she is very 'fond of her liberty (Gilpin 793-4). As if in corroboration of this, she rejects marriage offers from rich suitors i.e., Lord Warburton and Casper Goodwood as she does not want to be 'chained' or 'caught' (James 463). However, as it unfolds, she fails to see through the schemes of Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond and ends up 'imprisoned' (Gilpin 798) in a loveless marriage with the latter.

Isabela Archer may initially strike the reader as the quintessential feminist ideal. She is filled with the ideals of her independent spirit and reminds us that she would like to experience the world on her own terms in her turning down marriage offers from Lord Warburton and Casper Goodwood. Her English cousin Ralph Touchett is enthralled by her spirit of independence and convinces his father Mr. Touchett to leave Isabel a large fortune of around 70000 pounds to 'put some wind in her sails' (James, 259). However, Isabel falls a victim to an elaborate plot hatched by Madam Merle in view of her newly found inheritance and hook her up with the scheming Mr. Gilbert Osmond. A particular point of consideration for the *Portrait of Lady* for the sake of this study is why Isabel would 'hold on to miserable life with Osmond and 'chooses' to go back to a loveless marriage with a despotic husband despite the choice for better suitors. Neither Lord Warburton's disparate overtures for her to marry him from the time they first meet at Garden Court, nor Mr. Casper Goodwood's hopeless pursuit of her all the way from the states to throughout Europe, mend his luck any better. Isabel appears to be settled in her perspective with regard to her circumstances of life. Her subjective thought processes that direct her thoughts and her capacity for individual exercise of choice throughout the novel aid our understanding in how her subjectivity is formed and help understand why she would continue with an unhappy union formed through intrigues and deception than to set herself free.

In the second novel of the study, George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893) directly confronts the marriage question and is a comprehensive treatise on the institution of marriage itself and all that ails it. The *odd women* of the title refers to the 'half of million' women in 19th century England who as per numerical date were in excess for potential male suitors, thus left out as the surplus, the odd ones. It chronicles the lives of three Madden sisters, especially the youngest of them, Monica Madden, her disastrous marriage with Edmund Widdowson. The latter's bitterness due to the fact, as narrator notes, that 'he had wedded a woman who irresistibly proved to him her claims as a human being. Reason and tradition contended in him, to his ceaseless torment (Gissing 220). The novel recounts the characters' engagements on the institution of marriage as it was in the Victorian England and analysis of gender expectations towards this legally sanctioned bond.

Another key female character in the novel, Rhoda Nunn, much like James' Isabela Archer, cherishes her individual aspirations and prizes her independence. A staunch feminist, who views marriage as a prison for women, eventually falls in love with Everard Barfoot and at first accepts a marriage proposal from her, contrary to her views. Patricia Ingham in her introduction to the novel notes that that subject at issue in *The Odd Women* i.e., sexuality, gender and class end in impasse and the novel invites readers to challenge and question 'marriage as supposedly the object of every woman's life. This involves the questioning of how women generally should be educated and that, in turn leads to a scrutiny of nature and ability of women' (XIII). Thus, the 'nature and ability of women' can be tapped into, with regard to the chosen novels, through a gradual solidification process of how they are 'guided' towards worldly points of views in matters of their gender construction and subjectivity.

Finally, in our third and last novel of study, Thomas Hardy's 1895 *Jude the Obscure,* Sue Bridehood is introduced as a staunch exponent of tradition and traditional values, she constantly battles a conflict that see her hovering from her affinity to and obedience of Christian duties while battling her independence of mind and exceptional critical outlook as manifested in her debates with Jude. The character is vividly realized by the sheer contrast with the views of Jude Fawley, the eponymous protagonist of the novel. Sue Bridehead, just like Isabel in *The Portrait of a Lady* and Monica and Rhoda

Nunn in *The Odd Women* succumbs to tradition at the end and throws herself back to Mr. Phillotson whom she clearly detests. Like Isabel Archer in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* Sue Bridehead gives up on her ideals and closes the door on reason and ends up doing what she loathes the most.

Thus, the novel in the 19th century was already established as a crucial cultural site for the promulgation of ideas on gender norms, social relationships and functioned as a discursive vehicle that not only represents ideological baggage woven through the texts but also shaping them as a constitutive agent. The three novels provide the researcher with a cross section of late Victorian discourse practices on gender roles and marriage. All the three novels chosen for the study have the major theme of marriage in common. Marriage as a late Victorian institution exerted great influence on the dynamics of gender role. This study analyses marriage as a discursive practice that shaped gender subjectivity through the six-stage analytical model as devised by Carla Willig. The discourse of marriage moves in parallel with narratives of gender roles. Historically speaking, marriages upset the gender power dynamics in Victorian England with women getting the thin end of the bargain.

Now, in order to gain a historical perspective, I examine some of the dominant discourses on marriage and gender subjectivity in Victorian England as engaged by the prominent critics of the age. Prior to the Divorce Act of 1857, the women always got the thin end of the bargain in the matters of legislation between couples. The doctrine of coverture bestowed by common law meant that a woman's rights over her property and all other income were forgone as she entered marriage and the husband remained the absolute owner of her body and property. Coverture considered husband and wife as 'one' body and 'one person' before God and law, respectively. The husband was allowed carte blanche in his conduct towards his wife and until 1891, could keep her in custody against her manifest will (Marcus 206). There was no real effort to change these circumstances as the Victorians thought of family as a 'peaceful and loved refuge' wherein men conquered the public realm and the women 'presided over' home (Shanley 3).

The Victorian society looked down upon and ridiculed women who chose to remain single and preferred a life of personal independence outside the bonds of marriage. They could not tolerate the idea of independent women living on their own, as it went against established gender role of women. They considered marriage as the logical destiny of women as they were created to be remain within the confines of their husband's homes and be supported by them. This anguish of the changing dynamics of ingrained gender ideology is evidenced in the outcry against the changes through Matrimonial Clauses Act of 1857 that sought to declare marriage as a voidable contract. Sharon Marcus quotes an 1857 article that rallied against any changes in the 'greatest, oldest, and most universal of all social institutions, the great institution of marriage' as it was meant to be 'a lifelong compact which never can be rightfully dissolved' and that 'the principle of divorce' was a relic from the dark ages in the past and therefore obsolete (212-213). Discourse on gender roles and the institution of marriage constituted a substantial part of public debate in the Victorian England, especially in the last decades of the fin de siècle literature as influenced by the New Woman movement that championed the rights of women and struggled for gender equality. Victorian feminists realized that male domination grew in strength as women were compelled to submit to marriages through the force of customs and remaining single meant 'social death' and a life of complete dependence for economic support (Marcus 208).

The later decades of the Nineteenth century generated heated debates on the Women question and discourses on marriage and Victorian gender ideology of gender roles. While it had its fair share of ardent supporters, who championed gender equality and greater freedom for women, it did not yet lack critics who railed against any movement that sought to disengage women from traditional roles expected of them (Shanley 13). Important studies on marriage were published in the 1860s that their influence continued unabated as feminism grew in strength. It was this cascade of discourse on marriage and gender subjectivity in this period that led the Marxist philosopher Friedrich Engels to remark that before 'the beginning of the sixties, one cannot speak of a history of the family' (Marcus 74). However, as pro marriage activists pointed towards the harsh circumstances faced by unmarried single women, there were others who believed that marriage did not have to be the preordained destiny of women

and that life was much easier for independent single as they got to avoid surrendering themselves to the tyranny of husbands and forgoing all their individual rights (209).

The period also saw the emergence of scores of single women who embraced the public arena as feminist activists, artists and challenged Victorian discourses, calling for reforms towards a more inclusive society. They believed it was about time that the draconian gender ideology of Victorian England was subverted and called for a rebellion against the discriminatory strictures of marriage that closed the space on women in their private spheres. This spirit is reflected by Anna Jameson, who warned in an article in 1846 that the only way forward for the civilization lay gauzed in its treatment of women as only that set it apart from the dark ages. A woman should have the 'power to exercise her faculties and duties' and on it depended on the 'progress of our species' (216).

Given this background, the writings of the distinguished philosopher of the age, John Stuart Mill marks a watershed moment with their emphasis on the development and progress of women and challenging prevalent notions on gender subjectivity within the confines of institutional marriage. The plight of women in marriage is succinctly illustrated in the following lines of John Stuart Mill in his *The Subjection of Women* first published in 1869:

> In the case of women, each individual of the subject class is in a chronic state of bribery and intimidation combined, … if ever any system of privilege and enforced subjection had its yoke tightly rivetted on the necks of those who are kept down by it, this has." (21-22).

Mill was unequivocal in his view that the present condition of married women was a 'relic of the past,' and typical of 'the primitive state of slavery lasting on,' and as long as this situation remained, there would be no easy transition to a society that based its morals on 'consent, freedom, equality, and unconstrained self-development (*Subjection of Women*, 136, 132). To him, being a wife in a married relationship in Nineteenth century England was more of a slave in terms of their treatment than an actual slave as the latter could in effect have a semblance of independence away from his masters but a wife could not (54). Marriage, as it was in the late Nineteenth century, only sealed women's fate as slaves and in husbands they found masters who had the last word on them in all their affairs (*The Subjection of Women* 51). A wife is forced to live out her married life in

nothing more than bonded slavery and the law ensured that she remained in one (54). This holds up notwithstanding the tyranny that the husband can inflict on his wife, torturing and psychologically tormenting her. The wife must bear with him despite her hatred for him even if he chooses to 'enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations', … held in this worst description of slavery as to her own person' (57). This sorry situation was exacerbated by the fact that in case of men they were under no legal obligation to prove that they were fit marriage and could wield absolute power when it came to their wives (62).

Moreover, in *On Liberty,* Mill notes that the dominant and established moral codes on the marriage leave no other option for women than to regard entering marriage as needful even in a polygamous marriage than remaining single for the rest of their lives (156). Furthermore, he underscores the potential of discourses and their power to drive the ideological mission with a warning that a topic that is not 'fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed, it will be held as a dead dogma, not a living truth' (40). Again, in his *The Subjection of Women* he argues that:

> The sufferings, immoralities, evils of all sorts, produced in innumerable cases by the subjection of individual women to individual men, are far too terrible to be overlooked'… 'marriage is the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house' (140-141).

The Victorian gender ideology on marriage appeared flawed to JS Mill. Marriage simply meant that a man would get to rule over a woman and obtain all rights over another human being who could serve as a 'servant, a nurse or a mistress'. Moreover, it is doubly unjust as the husband and wife are not 'too much unlike to begin with' (165). He wrote in his *Early Essays on Marriage and Divorce* that the popular stereotypes around a life of spinsterhood forced women to marry for the fear of being single through social pressures. Spinsters were seen no more than an 'excrescence on the surface of society, having no use or function or office there' (73). He further noted that it was 'absurd to talk of equality while marriage is an indissoluble tie' (83). He was of the view that marriage should function as a contract and must 'depend for its continuance upon the wishes of the contracting parties' (74). He reiterated his stance on marriage as a contractual and voidable

bond that lasts during the pleasure of concerned parties, and each could have the power withdraw from the contract (*The Subjection of Women* 71).

Mill's voice in the marriage debates is carried forward by Victorian author M. Caird (1854-1932) with her rejection of gender norms in Victorian England. Caird was an admirer of Mill and was influenced intellectually by his work on gender issues. She favored a contractual marriage which presupposed equality of genders and dissolubility of marriage. In her *The Morality of Marriage* (1890) Caird maintained that 'as soon as the principle of equality between the sexes is sincerely accepted, there remains no valid reason against the immediate adoption of contract-marriage'. She firmly believed that if women could 'secure a liberty as great as that of men, in all the relations of life, marriage, as we now understand it, would cease to exist: its groundwork would be undermined' (167).

Caird kept the debate over marriage gender alive in the last decades of the Nineteenth century and employed similar themes in her own body of work. She maintained in *The Morality of Marriage* that 'it is certain that we shall never have a world really worth living in, until men and women can show interest in one another without being driven to marry (103). Moreover, she took issue with the use of the term 'women's nature' as she asserted in her essay on marriage in the *Westminster Review* that 'no protest can be too strong against the unthinking use of the term 'woman's nature'. An unmanageable host of begged questions, crude assertion, and unsound habits of thought are packed into those two hackneyed words' (188). Mill would have agreed with Caird on her conception of nature as he thought it was impossible to generalize over it given human nature had an 'extraordinary susceptibility' to external circumstances and influences beyond one's control (*The Subjection of Women* 41).

Another noteworthy political activist, critic and a champion of feminism was Cobbe (1822–1904) who fervently engaged with gender discussions of the age. Cobbe, in her *Celibacy v. Marriage*, an essay that she penned in 1862, argues that women who did not commit themselves to a marital bond could nonetheless live happy and fulfilling lives and they should not therefore be beset with the fears of 'a solitary old age' (231). Her 1878 article *Wife Torture in England* was instrumental in building pressure through public opinion that facilitated the passing of laws that meant women could seek to separate more

easily from husbands who had been found guilty of domestic battery and assault (Marcus 231).

John Stuart Mill, Mona Caird and Francis Cobbe had critics from the other end of spectrum in the Victorian discourses on gender subjectivity and institutionalized marriage. For instance, Oliphant, in her defense of doctrine of coverture that considered married couples as one entity in front of law railed against New Women critics who were against it. She believed that 'justice which means an equal division of rights has no place between those two persons whom natural policy as well as Divine institution teach us to consider as one', for Oliphant 'marrying is like dying—as distinct, as irrevocable, as complete' (381). The idea of marriage being a solemn irrevocable contract resonated in the late 19th century writers as well. For instance, in Wilkie Collins' novel *Man and Wife* (1870), the narrator views marriage as the 'the most important contract of civilized life' (232).

In a similar fashion, Ruskin (1819-1900), along with Oliphant argued against gender independence. His was an eminent voice in the Victorian marriage discourse. His essay titled *On Queen's Gardens* (1864) fueled much debate. Ruskin argued that women belonged in the domestic sphere which served as a peaceful haven for men after their struggles in the outside world providing for the family. He maintained the native traits that men and women possess set them apart for different roles:

> The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender… But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision… Her great function is Praise: she enters no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest (44).

Ruskin found support from conservative women of the period as well. Eliza Lynn Linton (1822-1898) had emerged as a prominent Victorian antifeminist. Her idea of 'womanly' in her *Girl of the Period* essays, defined women as devoid of personal ambition, quiet, submissive, with utmost modesty and without any passion (340). Linton was dismissive of the New Woman and made them an object of ridicule in her essays. Then there were those who believed that marriage had run its course and even suggested it women were better off staying single than locked in misery for the most of their married lives. The public ignominy and shame that followed divorces was not a very enviable

spectacle. Anne Thackeray Richie observed in her essay *Toilers and Spinster* that one did not look forward to marital miseries in divorces where women would have to knock at a divorce lawyer's door to rid herself of a husband who beats her with his umbrella, spends her money, and knocks her down instead of 'lifting her up. (Ritchie 5).

Even those who opposed the New Women writers and championed institutional marriage were not indifferent to the idea that some women may not marry. W.R. Greg emerged to the forefronts in public debates over marriage with his 1862 essay, *Why Are Women Redundant,* wherein he protested the idea of making women independent and proposed that those women cannot find suiters in marriage should be sent to those British colonies where men outnumbered them. Greg's article bears testimony to the sheer contempt that Victorians had for those women who could not marry (276). He further argued that if women were forced to earn their own living instead of 'spending and husbanding the earnings of men' and without the 'natural duties and labours of wives and mothers', they would be compelled to 'carve out artificial and painfully sought occupations for themselves' and 'lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own (282). Greg went on to argue against feminist initiatives to make independent by providing them employments. He believed if that by enabling women to earn their subsistence in competition with 'hardier sex in those careers and occupations hitherto set apart for that sex alone', the prospect of marriage would seem to be one of the many opportunities available to them and they would be living a life beset with unnatural celibacy (280). Notwithstanding his fervent support for traditional marriage, even Greg relented that:

> If a lady is possessed of a very moderate competence, and a well- stored and well-regulated mind, she may have infinitely less care and infinitely more enjoyment than if she had drawn any of the numerous blanks which beset the lottery of marriage" (299).

This statistical approach of W.R. Greg was employed by Francis Cobbe in her 1862 essay *What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids* maintaining that the social landscape of England was affected by more single women choosing to live on their own which functioned as a constitutive and transformative element in the society (237). Similarly, William Lecky did not see marriage as 'coequal partnership'. He thought that the Romans idea of a marriage as contract that can be dissolved at will was essentially flawed and he

invoked a religious (Christian) discourse to substantiate his argument. He therefore described divorce as an extreme sin that not only signals a rejection of the husband but also amounts to a repudiation of faith in God (352). Likewise, W.S Lilly, in his essay *Marriage and Modern Civilization* went to the extent of calling Christian marriage as the 'Magna Charta of woman in modern civilization' and a 'lifelong union' between two people. Any endeavors to degrade this bond into a dissoluble contract would be akin to reverting to the dark ages of savagery (905).

Thus, it was not until the last three decades of Nineteenth century that some laws i.e., Infant Custody Acts of 1873 and 1886, Matrimonial Clauses Act of 1878 and Summary Jurisdiction Act of 1895 saw the light of day (Shanley 131). The passing of these bills gave women certain rights of custody of their children and facilitated separation cases for those who had suffered abuse in the hands of their husbands. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 gave couples access to divorce but was heavily tilted in the favor husbands (Levine 166). Husbands could divorce their wives on adultery, but wives had to bring up and prove one more offence besides adultery. The Dower Act of 1833 had granted husbands control even after their demise; they could stipulate conditions that wives would forgo husband's property if they chose to remarry. Similarly, the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 gave women further control of their property by allowing the wives to keep their inherited property in their own name instead of automatically transferring to husbands upon marriage.

Phillipa Levine argues that marriage for the Victorian women was the 'single most profound and far-reaching institution' and had a defining effect on the course of their lives and if left unmarried, they would be 'set aside from the society's common lot of the sex (150). Those who did end up marrying were hurled into a different set of problems. Marriage meant a complete divestment of personal freedom along with forgoing of any claim on property. Ahough a wedded life meant complete resignation to constant domestic toil and frequent childbirths, it did afford them a raised social station, thus setting them apart from the 'surplus women' (152). Hence, an examination of discourses that validated marriage as monolith of an institution aids in discovering the influence of the discursive practices therein.

According to Kinnear and Shanley, it took a series 'multi-strategied campaigns' within the 'first wave' feminist movement in England to not only make women an equal partner in the confines of a married relationship with her husband but to make her equal before the law in general. This early movements are largely credited for the first seminal law i.e., Married Woman's Property Act (1882) that rightly christened as the 'Magna Carta' for women's liberation (115). Prior to this, the common law had ordained women as the property of men which equaled marital slavery for the wives. Furthermore, the law of 'coverture' had drastic consequences for women and assumed that a married woman by default forgoes her legal personality to her husband (ibid). That stemmed from the notion that following the act of marriage both husband and wife become 'one body' before God and 'one person' in the law and husband becomes the legal representative (115). Shanley, writing at the close of the last decade of 20th century laments the fact that:

> The confrontation between the notion of marriage based on hierarchy and male dominance and the vision of marriage based on spousal equality and marital friendship did not, therefore, end at the close of the nineteenth century. It is a struggle that continues in philosophical and public policy debates in our own day (19).

Moreover, Doggett states that the 'coverture', whereby the legal existence of the woman is subsumed in the husband, bestowed upon the latter 'to chastise and confine' the wife. Far from the semblance of oneness or unity, this gave the husband the right 'to control the conduct of his wife' and that 'it was not the fiction of unity but the husband's right to beat and imprison which was fundamental. . .. Far from being a consequence of coverture, the husband's right of control was its very essence" (35). The force of law was thus couched in the 'fiction of marital unity' which paved the way for further 'obscuring the reality' and invoked to strip women of 'legal personhood and from citizenship' (83). Marriage was, thus, a crucial decision for both parties involved with life chancing consequences. Phegley notes that despite the increased emphasis on love as the best basis for a lasting union, 'marriage was still largely an economic decision' and class considerations affected how potential courtships were pursued. (13). Married life for the Victorian women was also influenced by the passive particulars of daily lived experience. Hamlett maintains that 'securing individual privacies' owed much to how domestic space was arranged. The 'division of space' worked either to separate or bring individuals

together (05) and it did not entirely depend on ‘differences of age, gender, and status’ and therefore was not determined by it (11).

According to Heckman, Mill had already underscored the reality of the period that women were chained through the institution of marriage. They could not make reasoned choices stemming from ‘rational freedom’ but rather had to ‘choose’ a life laboring in servitude through the confines of the of a legalistic marriage (Heckman, 681). They were essentially ‘denied the autonomy of the individual’ and freedom for woman was proportionate to her independence of economic means and could only gain freedom if she earned her own living without the despotic control of a husband in a marriage (682). Mill stressed equal opportunity for attainment of education as a prerequisite for equality in other walks of life. That, in turn, ensures that women could be able to achieve their full potential through an independent choice of careers.

In the hindsight, Hekman takes exception to Mill’s suggested road to independence, that woman should ‘choose’ marriage as a career and it was the only option available to her, although in circumstances where women possess ‘faculties exceptionally adapted to any other pursuit’ can explore and opt for other ‘career’ options besides marriage (Hekman 683). Given that Mill equates independence with women’s ability to earn her own steady subsistence, being single would come at a cost. Mill’s equality of the sexes gets obfuscated when he states that ‘the married woman’s role is to ‘adorn and beautify’ her husband’s life’ and that when it comes to division of labor what is ‘natural and healthy’ is that women should stick to fine arts while men would do tasks that require physical exertion and greater strength (Hekman 685). This must be seen in the context of the then contemporary socio0economic conditions. To Mill, as he notes in his *The Subjection of Women,* men are just ‘little higher than brutes’ and are nonetheless able to get a victim in the shape of a wife through the operations of marriage and that the extent of human misery facilitated through this institution is inexorably sustained by it (46). He goes on to note that thanks to the old English laws, marriage meant that husband turns into the sovereign and is the ‘lord of the wife’ and if a wife were to murder her husband, it would get classified as treason, the penalty for which entailed the wife being burned to death (54).

Mill reminds us that given that the subjection of women appears natural, it is to be seen in the context that all forms of dominations throughout history appear as 'natural' to those at the helm of them (Mill, 19). He wonders why women have lagged behind despite the advantages of the modern life, wherein it would stand to reason that women may be accorded equality and autonomy. It manifests that reason has lost out to the force of tradition (Mill, 24). Now that women continue to be subjected bears testimony to the fact that 'rational principals of modern life have not caught on' (12). Mill also tackles the question of whether feminine 'nature' is primordially settled or affected and shaped by the environment that she is a part which in turn determines her character. This distinction is crucial for Mill as it has implications for their socio-economic and political position (682). Mill maintains, that a difference in the level of education and peculiar set of circumstances get to decide the so called 'natural' differences between the two sexes. Although at odds with his at times favored leaning towards traditional institution as the role of women in a marriage, Mill mostly manifests his liberal position and consents to the prevailing of reason over custom and tradition (682).

Thus, the Victorian landscape of debates on the discourses on marriage and gender roles was giving way in the face of fresh ideas on marriage and critics embraced the fin de siècle notion that 'marriage between men and women was not a universal element of social life' (Marcus 210). It was a long-drawn battle to secure more rights for woman in traditional marriages in Victorian England.

Now, having outlined the contemporary debates on marriage and gender subjectivity in the Victorian period, the following first chapter of the thesis examines in detail the conceptual and methodological framework of the thesis. It analyses Foucauldian discourse analysis and examines it in relationship with critical discourse analysis. Each of the novels is then analyzed in separate chapters with a concluding chapter at the end. The three chosen texts from late Victorian period are viewed through methodological tools offered by Carla Willig which are explicated in their constituent parts as progressive and contingent mechanics that shape gender subjectivity through the force of the institution of marriage.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

1.1 Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

The research at hand seeks to analyse the three selected late Victorian novels from the perspective of Foucauldian discourse analysis through a six-stage analytical model as laid out by Carla Willig in *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology* in conjunction with perspectives gleaned from Foucauldian critics. Willig's exploratory model consists of six analytical stages that equip the researcher with the investigative tools to analyse a text and examine the ways it builds discursive objects and subjects. The analysis also examines the implications for practice and subjectivity for the female characters from the given novels emanating from these constructions.

Foucauldian Discourse entails systems of knowledge amidst social practices. They, in turn, get to set parameters as what constitutes reality in a society. Social values and standards guide and direct individuals' standards for what is accepted with regards to gender characteristics, notions of masculinity and femininity (Kavoura et al, 02). Hence, individual ideological compass is controlled by the force of prevalent discursive practices. They overtime cement into fixed subjectivities with dwindling scope for change. Given the discourses at play in a particular period, subjective oblivion to these factors helps to further entrench them instead of challenging discourses. A lack of active knowledge into the mechanisms of action that solidify discursive practice could rob individual volition in their conduct and give a lopsided sense of personal identity.

According to Parker, Foucauldian discourse analysis regards 'text' in its broadest sense that involves networks of meaning (discourses) that construct social and psychological realities (*Discourse Dynamics* 30). Parker favors a critical realist position that recognizes the premise that 'our knowledge of the world is necessarily mediated by, and therefore also constructed through language' and at the same time 'recognizing underlying structures and mechanisms that generate phenomena used to construct through language' (*Ibid* 141). To Willig, constructions of reality through discourse are 'grounded in social and material structures, such as institutions and their practices' (Willig, 2008).

Parker (1992) maintains Foucauldian Discourse Analysis needs to address the conditions which make the meanings of texts possible'(28). Parker regards Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as social constructionist in orientation that subscribes to a critical realist epistemology (97). Thus, the examination of how discourses about the institution of marriage occur begets prime importance. It illuminates the subtleties of discourse and promotes the unravelling of their origins that supply them with authority.

The discourses that figure in the works chosen for the purpose of this study are critical in parsing the discursive practices at play in the novels by Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*, George Gissing's *The Odd Women*, and Thomas Hardy's *Jude The Obscure*. The subject discourses are crucial in bringing about the disparate mechanisms that yield perspectives on the thoughts and perceptions of the female characters in the texts and the ways they engage the themes of gender subjectivity and marriage as an institution in the last two decades of Victorian period. The thesis employs a three-pronged exploratory perspective, i.e., the occurrence of the systems of discourses on the marriage and gender, the authors engagement of those themes and their wider scope within the discursive practices of the period that these themes occur.

The thesis utilizes Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (henceforth referred to as FDA) as its theoretical framework to explicate the discourses in the given novels by examining the dynamic relationship of Foucauldian discourse vis-a-vis gender subjectivity, the institution of marriage as an enabling power structure that sustains it. Michel Foucault rethought existing contemporary notions of subject, truth and power and broke away from modernist modes of thought and challenged established dichotomies (Hekman 1). It is a rethinking of classical binaries of established value systems where truth, power, subject and object are pared to their very essence revealing fissures and facilitating the reconfiguring of those systems.

Foucault's position on discourse posits that prevailing discursive practices (at a given historical period that forms its episteme) are central towards forming subjective identities through dominant structures of power and its allied institutions. It is vital to understand the evolution of gender subjectivity within the purview of historical period and its potential for deviation from the institutions that control and define their individual

agency. Given this scenario, this study evaluates the protagonists in three novels within their historical context and examines constituent discursive practices that constitute their ideological compass and allows or limits their scope of action given the structures of power that they are set in. The authors engaging the themes can help partaking in the epistemic discourses at play. Their interpretation on the socio-economic issues of the time emanates from their utilizing the systems of discourses and the way they build consent or dissent, opens up fertile ground for explicating the driving force behind gender narratives.

Moreover, the female protagonists and their states of minds are examined through FDA and the six-stage analytical model to determine if the subject characters correspond to discursively molded figures that are hard at inexorably wrapping themselves up with power structures by submitting to institutions (either at a conscious level or subconsciously) or challenge narrative controls instruments by expressing dissent and challenging discourses. Foucault maintains in his *The History of Sexuality* that discourses are not permanent structures outside of human control but rather active agents that sustain themselves through entrenched institutions. Exploring the building blocks of the power that drives the institutions can lead to spotlighting and in effect voiding the power origins. The sources of discourse can therefore be identified and thus open ways for challenging them and vitiating their control mechanisms (97). Discourses, for the purposes of the study at hand, are responsible for forming gender subjectivities and determining what identity markers the characters subscribe to. The discursive conditions get to form categories of gender identities that either float with the status quo or deliver means of resistance that go counter to the circumstances (Foucault 97-101). In his book, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault notes that discourses determine perceptions of the body and govern how gender notions are construed with a discursive environment. Therefore, as the discourse register changes over times, so do the perceptions towards gender identity that go along with them (137-138). That would open ways for alternative ways of identity constructions and have positive ramifications for how gender norms operate in a given society.

The characters in the novels play out their respective roles within compass of the discourses under which they operate. Thus, it provides an interesting investigative tool to delve deeper how the gender identity is negotiated in the books given the different discursive practices and how they see themselves in relation to differing cultural

viewpoints. These notions come out when the characters practice their genders. The texts in the novels and the characters mirror the social values of the times they are set in (late Victorian period), as outlined in the introductory chapter of the thesis.

Therefore, the novels, being realist fiction, draw distinct parallels to the late Victorian period in English history. Foucault had already contended in his *The Archeology of Knowledge* that dominant discourses determine and shape how individuals perceive reality. Therefore, what can be thought or acted out is drastically limited by the set of variables at play at a historical moment and subjective range of possible action is crudely mediated through those discursive practices. This in turn structures the parameters of human thought and conduct (Foucault 125, 147). The later Victorian society, as the given novels are set in, determines its own parameters of truth subsequent upon the reigning discourses of gender. In *Discipline and Knowledge* Foucault maintains that the production and distribution of discourses is structured by the prevailing notions of truth and its status is inexorably contested through discourses (126). For him, truth is discursively mediated (7), and forms a constituent element of episteme, which is the established mode of acquiring and arranging knowledge in each period (*The Archeology of Knowledge* 214). Given this discursive nature of knowledge itself, as being dependent on epistemic parameters, power, knowledge, and truth notions are in a constant flux and experience change within the confines of that episteme (*The History of Sexuality 94*).

Thus, the institution of marriage in the late Victorian period can be regarded as one of the 'disciplining structures' that control, regulate and pass verdict on established norms and deviances by engaging in, as Foucault puts 'games of truth'. They derive their authority by their truth claims which in turn are a result of the power and control mechanisms sanctioned by the episteme in that historical period (117). The discursive practices in the novels under analysis portray an epistemic space and depict the characters gender role expectations. What they can and cannot do in a given set of circumstances is largely determined by the ordering of the episteme. This force of the discourses serves as a veritable straitjacket for the characters and confines their subjective worldview. Therefore, for Foucault (*History of Sexuality*), it becomes crucial that the constituent elements of the discourses are explicated to make way for a 'new politics of truth 'which

serves to put in perspective all hegemonic institutions, eviscerating forms of socio economic and cultural power structures that operate on the basis of those truths (133).

In the novels chosen for this dissertation, social sanction and institutions play a defining role in how the characters behave and think. The power emanating from these institutions cements the ensuing discourses that populate a given episteme and forms a complex archeology. For Foucault, a critical rethinking of power surfaces as an element that in turn produces knowledge. He charts an intricate relationship of power and knowledge that feed into and sustain each other as he observes in *Discipline and Punish:*

> We should admit rather that power produces knowledge…that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These are power knowledge relations" (27).

Discourse is formed through a complex interplay of power, that in turn produces knowledge and constitute truth statements, and through this, discourse derives its authority (*The History of Sexuality 101*). Discourse, as Foucault states, therefore, functions as a vehicle of influence as well as an effect of power. However, the very nature of discourse production makes allowance for a counter force. Effects of power within episteme do not preclude points of resistance. On one hand, while discourse produces and sustains power, on the other, it also opens avenues for thwarting its efficacy (101).

Foucauldian discourse is not a passive cauldron where power, knowledge, and truth struggle for supremacy but it but is 'the thing for which and by which there is struggle' (*The Order of Discourse,* 211). It may be viewed as a constant flux where the eventual authority of discourse emerges from. Foucauldian idea of power therefore makes a clean break with the previously held notions of power. He takes issue with the modern definition of power as an entity that can be held and distributed at volition, always at the beck and call of a dominant social class that uses it suppress others and safeguard its own interests. On the other hand, in Foucauldian discourse, power is viewed differently. It is not even the sole property of the state but as Foucault puts it in *Discipline and Punish,* power is constituted through a complex web of techniques and 'functions in the form of a chain' and it is put into exercise via a 'a net like organization' (26). This makes power highly dynamic and flexible and is not limited by an identified locale. In *The History of*

Sexuality, Foucault maintains that 'power is everywhere not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere' (93) and this take on power contrasts it with modernist view where it functions as a defined entity used for oppression, devoid of a dynamic and fluid source (89).

Foucault stresses this point further in *Discipline and Punish* where he categorically maintains that power is often thought in negative attributes. It being something that 'it excludes, it represses, it censors, it abstracts, it masks, it conceals. In fact, power produces reality: it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth' (194). Furthermore, he states in *Power and Knowledge* that power is constitutive of discourses, social relations, and subjects when it is put into exercise (59). The intricate relationship of power, knowledge and truth play a vital role in the hierarchy of discourses and their relative position with that hierarchy.

According to Foucault, freedom may not necessarily be construed as the opposite of power in the context of being controlled through it. No state can exist outside the power dynamic. The discourse subsumes everything, and a state of freedom occurs when there is resistance in the complex web of discursive relations and never independent of it. It is important for the individuals to break free of the complex chain of power of regulatory authority by recognizing how it is sustained so as to cultivate grounds for being consciously aware of its operating sources. Moreover, freedom does not exist in the absence of power as it is the later that opens up avenues for a wide range of actions and alternative possibilities (*The Subject and Power, 221*). This therefore entails that the women protagonists in the novels *The Portrait of a Lady, The Odd Women and Jude the Obscure* have to negotiate the discourses around marriage and the gender subjectivity within the epistemic space of later Victorian period. An examination of how they react to the disciplining structures in the time they live and could reveal the control mechanisms of the discursive practices. This being borne in mind that if they had access to an alternative set of positions within their peculiar epistemic environment, their subjectivity could have been differently conditioned.

Power implicit in social discourses exerts its control in how gender roles are played. Being cognizant of these discursive forces helps to counter them and open

alternative means of engagement for women. As discussed above, the very oppressive nature of discourse coupled with power dynamics also hides ammunition for its subversion and counter discourse. FDA is key to understanding the novels and the characters as it strives to unravel the complexity of dominant discursive practices and we can examine discourses at play that can unearth alternative modes of functioning for the characters under analysis. This engages discourse as a catalyst that allows instances of resisting dominant power structures and countering them. Therefore, if discourses are effectively reengineered, there can be immense scope for its influence on Foucauldian power and knowledge dynamic. A key constituent of FDA is its treatment of traditional absolutes i.e., truth, power, knowledge as complex systems that continue to influence, change, and redefine one another. Therefore, unlike, traditional mode of using of broad brush, and considering them as end all monoliths, Foucault's conceptual framework moves to demystify and unwind these grand concepts into their very constituent elements, keeping in mind that they too are in a complex flux and change direction when points of resistance are added to the change. Thus, examining the discourses and the narratives used by the authors in the three novels chosen for the study, should unravel those elements when explicated through the model laid out by Carla Willig.

Foucault mentions in *The History of Sexuality* that power and resistance stay together, and power derives its validity through what he calls 'multiplicity of point of resistance'. However, the points of resistance cannot be pigeonholed to a one specific rebellion (92). A counter discourse towards the established ones creates an offsetting mechanism that redirects power. Resistance may be viewed as a natural corollary to the presence of power. Foucault regards all forms of resistance as the life blood for the existence of power relations as its raison detre. If it were not for possibilities of rebellion and subjective revolts, the very existence of power relations would be mute (90). To Foucault, instances for subjective freedom in the face of domination occur via changes in the power relations and they can vitiate power structures and augment independence (*Power/ Knowledge, 85*). This elevates Foucauldian subject as an entity that can resist and gain freedom instead of merely being a passive recipient that is only acted upon. Therefore, the subject characters are set in the unique positions of either submitting at an unconscious level to the power of reigning discursive practices in their midst or challenge

the power/knowledge dynamic and create the resistance needed to bring out the kind of independence of spirit that redirects discourses to their advantage.

Subjects can both succumb to power relations and can also define and direct them. Foucauldian 'assujettisseement' is defined as coexisting state of subjection or subjugation. It therefore conforms both to the sense of being subjugated or adjusting as subject. Gender subjectivity may stem from the complex relationship of power, knowledge that form and shape individuals. It allows for counter discourses on the part of subjects. Individuals can assert freedom and devise modes of action that reset the chain and may lead to independence from the stronghold of power relations that define discursive practices (*Discipline and Punish,* 26). Therefore, Foucauldian subjects are not helpless objects at the total mercy of dominant authority, only to be regulated and 'normalized'. They can assert volition and change through the attendant plurality of points of resistance in power/knowledge relationship (*The History of Sexuality* 128). This Foucauldian concept of 'assujettisseement' couches the idea of individual reaction to the external stimuli i.e., inherent its French meaning of 'subjection or subjugation' speak to the subjects accepting the norms around them or taking active notice of their situation and trigging a change. Thus, subjects are accorded a degree of freedom in the default state as they possess a faculty for critical reflection on their own state of affairs instead of passively accepting preset subjective positions. As the characters engage socio-political discourses through their exchanges and free reflection, it sets them in opposition with power structures and can therefore allow themselves the space to examine them within the wider discourses of their historical period as analyzed in the preceding section and further elaborated within relevant analysis chapters of the respective novels. The comparative discourses on marriage as an institution of power that seeks to limit individual independence can be analyzed and modes of resistance from the characters thus involved be recorded.

For the individual to break free of the subjective mold, they will have to go through a paradigm shift where they can rethink new ways of self-exploration, opening themselves up to newer experiences. This, in turn, will realign an individual's ways of thinking and provide means to circumnavigate the imposed subjective control. Foucault called this manner of development for the subject 'the care of self'. This process arms the individual to rethink and free themselves from the chokehold of cultural taboos and moral policing

that defines a period (*Care of Self* 18). Foucault's idea of 'care of self' is akin to a toolbox for the subject to cancel out subversive discursive control by engaging with the discourses and then using them as a means for emancipation. It aids them to examine anew the conditions that make the discourses possible in the first place. It involves challenging the established, contesting the norm, exploring the pillars that discursive values stand on and carving a new oath for the self. It is not always the default choice for the individuals, who more often than not get so enmeshed in the control mechanisms of the narratives that it becomes exceptionally arduous to extricate themselves out of it. The notion of 'care of self' further sits in balance with his view of the subject as a fluid entity that can counter discourses through independent self-reflection that affords them a way out of the oppressive institutional authority.

Furthermore, in *Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault states that given the complex chain of discursive positions vying for dominance, it also grants the possibility for the subject to upstream the path of discourse and carve a space for independent thought (16). Robinson argues that Foucault's mode of thinking takes life from the idea that it engenders something new by challenging the norm, leading to a crisis of sorts. In this the 'the thought must shock itself into something new' and emerge as force that creates new modes of thinking (265). Therefore, the subject is no more a helpless bystander without say at all but, rather someone that can participate and add to the very process of discourse formation with positive influence for succeeding values of power and knowledge. For this stage to occur, the subject needs to assert its independence through critical engagement with all the strands of dominant discourses to make it viable for new and alternative modes of thinking to gain ground (266).

The multiplicity of the discourses and their shifting nature within the epistemes of their period of production makes them an invaluable resource to examine how the characters and the authors of the three novels interact with the discourses and therefore yield insights that cater to the research objectives for this thesis. Given this plurality of discourses, Foucault's idea of discourse become especially crucial as it allows space for multiple discourses and this multiplicity opens up a greater number of points of resistance that subjects can utilize and assert individual will. A closer examination of the late Victorian epistemic space entails analysis of dominant narratives that the three authors

engaged. Beginning from James's *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1881, Gissing's *The Odd Women* in 1893 to Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* in 1895, the last two decades of the period tackled the themes of marriage and gender dynamics that can yield invaluable insight from a modern theoretical lens of FDA.

As Foucault notes in his *The History of Sexuality,* a discursive component is not set permanently, but possesses ample ground for multiple potential permutations. Moreover, reasoning from this standpoint, identity tags, dominant ideas and moral force can no longer hold their own as set realities but are rather vulnerable to cross examination with the individual's asserting of the self and creating new definitions for all aspects of reality (157). The idea of resistance to discourse is crucial to understanding aspects of subjectivity from Foucauldian point of view. This resistance on the part of the subject is further elaborated in Foucault's idea of 'biopower', which combines forms of power, human sexuality, and the subject's body. This takes form through its ability to 'incite, control, monitor' optimize and organize the forces under it'. It is therefore capable of producing and breeding forces, not just exercising its control through forcing them to submit (136). This means that subjective control does not entirely rest upon external means that work their way into utilizing force to subdue the individual into submission but can also derive their disciplinary mechanisms through a process of internalization (141).

This stems from Foucault's idea of technology of power where the discursive force, through a complex system of internalization ensures that the subject seeks to obey as it starts to be governed by subjective values influenced by external discursive practice. This ascertains that a collective lot is so affected by set institutions with their power to sustain this process. Foucault's idea of modern power, as discussed above, builds on the premise that power instead of functioning as self-contained entity that seeks to control through the use of force is rethought as being codes into discursive practices of the period and eventually carried onwards by the subjects themselves, thus sustaining its efficacy. Subjects over time fall a prey to the subtle expectations of conduct and codes of regulations as erected by the institutional order.

FDA posits that there are various versions of the world, all discursively mediated. Some of the discourses are more entrenched through institutional support bases which become the 'true' and accepted ways of perceiving social structures. However, no one particular version of world or reality remains dominant forever as the very nature of discourse means they are under a constant state of flux, akin to postmodernist state of 'uncertainty, frivolity and reflexivity (Parker 71). This idea lends support to the premise that discourse structures may be deeply ingrained in social practices with lasting repercussions, conversely. Implicit in the very idea of FDA is the fact the nature of discourse production facilitates the use of counter discourses. If subjects rear the consciousness above their mundane lot, they could essentially redirect the dialogue and contribute the production of social values if supplied enough fodder.

Foucauldian discourse derives its strength from the fact that Foucault is primarily regarded as a philosopher more inclined towards interrogative practice instead of unearthing of the essentials. The main concepts he investigates are discourse, power, and subject. To some critics, his work conforms to three distinct phases. First, he studies discourses or disciplines of human knowledge, the second focuses on dynamics of power and the third phase of his investigative work focuses on a theory of human subjectivity or self (McHoul VIII). Foucault himself notes in the second volume of his *The History of Sexuality* that 'it seemed appropriate to look for the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself qua subject' (1986a 6). His last area of interest with regard to this analysis of the novel characters and the examination of their motivating factors behinds their disparate courses of action aids and sharpens the analytical tools utilized in the six-stage model chosen for the study. Foucault viewed human subject as product of subjection. His conception of the subject shapes up as:

> Historically located, disciplinary processes and concepts which enable us to consider ourselves as individual subjects and which constrain us from thinking otherwise. These processes and concepts (or 'techniques') are what allow the subject to 'tell the truth about itself' (Foucault, 1990:38).

To McHoul, these 'techniques' translate into processes and concepts that precede subjects' eventual views of themselves about 'what we are'. In short, the public sphere of discursive objects and influences take root before they manifest themselves in private

sphere (3). Foucault's method explicates the subject by trying to 'discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc. (*Power/knowledge* 97). Foucault maintains in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* that 'discourses or systems of knowledge derive their force from human and historical practice. He further notes 'since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made' (37). This gives FDA an advantage in terms of rerouting future discourses by reconfiguring at their sources, i.e., the natural environs of their occurrence and the driving forces that provide them with the impetus.

Discourses function as tools that define that the normal and the commonsense and attempt to maneuver people into 'correct' and 'functional' forms of thinking and behavior. FDA, therefore, sets to examine the methods, practices and techniques of these discourses and understand their mechanics of 'normalization' (McHoul 18) and studies how they form values on whose basis subjects are scaled i.e., the good, the bad, the faithful wife, the antisocial and so on. It further posits that:

> In any given historical period, we can write, speak, or think about a given social object or practice only in certain specific ways and not others. 'A discourse' would then be whatever constrains—but also enables—writing, speaking, and thinking within such specific historical limits (McHoul 31).

Furthermore, as McHoul notes, the world outside and our consciousness of it result from individual mediation of available set of conditions. The discourses not only produce representations but also constitute the site that can 'enable' and 'constraint' socially productive imagination (38). Discursive objects and their construction is not random that happen out of nowhere but derive their force from 'social and material conditions i.e. institutions and practices' (Flick 310).

In keeping with the Foucauldian idea of discourse, Woolgar contends that given discourses constitute objects, they are indeed a 'representational practice' (93). Parker stresses this representative element of discourses further and maintains 'discourse constructs 'representations' of the world which have a reality almost as coercive as gravity, and, like gravity, we know of the objects through their effects' (*Discourse*

Dynamics, 8) and calls for being wary in analysis of ideological moorings that texts bear (9).

The potential of the discourses as normative agents of conduct adjusting the confines of the moral landscape makes the understanding of their mechanism of action pivotal for bringing about a meaningful change, and in the longer run providing people with more thorough perspective. It is therefore possible to distill into concrete statements the disparate 'metaphors, analogies and pictures' painted in the texts under analysis. Only then can we identify 'regulated' system of statements at the heart of discursive practice and the statements can be mapped into sets referring to the same topic (Henriques 105). Parker argues that all instances of discourses must be seen in the locality in space and time. A 'diachronic' sample of a discursive object in a particular time period can illustrate its 'synchronic' relation with similar discourses of the past (1992: 16). This diachronic view of discourses and getting to understand them in their given space and time sits well with the Foucauldian idea of the epistemic importance of discourse construction.

Parker, thus, argues in his *Discourse Dynamics* that discourse analysis will have to consider 'the conditions which make the meanings of texts possible' (28). Therefore, an explicatory process that is aimed at analyzing the discourse making systems facilitates the understanding the chosen novel texts with reference to the research questions. Moreover, Flick condenses Parker's (1992) investigative methodology into specific broad categories that map patterns in discourses. With a written text, it would begin by free associating 'cultural networks' and systematically itemizing discursive objects while considering the text as the object of study devoid of its connotative objectives. This makes the implicit more fruitful at deducing meaning than the implied. In this mode of investigation, the characters' subject positions and roles are recorded systematically. Finally, it maps the potential for practice for subjects of the text and arrange the networks of relationships into patterns. These patterns in the text are discourses and can then be considered in terms of 'ideology, power and institutions' (310). Similarly, the methodological tools chosen for the study as set out by Willig consider all of the above-mentioned insights from Parker while analyzing the texts.

Discourse in a strict Foucauldian sense is defined by Parker in *Discourse Dynamics* as 'sets of statements that construct objects and an array of subject positions' (245). As a result, the resulting ideological prism defines the way people see the world along with myriad ways of being. Discourses do not materialize in a vacuum, they are instead the active agents that factor in the transformation of individuals and corner them into certain subject positions, which in turn form subjectivities and color human experience of the world around them. Now it is important to figure out the sources of those 'statements' and analyse the factors for their validity in a society. If it is the institutional control of marriage that forces subjects to go by an approved and often invisible codebook. The ensuing actions may appear as counterintuitive to a disinterested eye, but the characters often are straitjacketed in their use of the discourse systems to their own detriment.

FDA examines the mechanics of social institutions and the way they deal with forms of legitimation and discursive powers. As noted above, discourses work as ideological glasses and limit human experience of the outside world unless they fall within the purview of a dominant discourse. They become deeply entrenched in society over time and appear common sense knowledge to the untrained eye. Certain versions of social reality are privileged and maintain existing structures of society. The mechanics of operations of the systems of knowledge that thrive on the subjugation of one party would break at the seams if contested in individual parts.

The relation between institutions and discourses is an essential element of FDA as far as their role in sustaining institutional practices is concerned. It follows that institutional discourses, while legitimizing social structures are in turn sustained and validated by the very same institutions (legalized marriage as a control mechanism). If a person internalizes a certain subject position, they are governed by it and they effectively surrender their selves in the process. FDA considers the constructions of subject positions as mediated through language use. The characters and their sphere of action is straitjacketed by an available set of conditions, not necessarily physical. This way the privileged ideology, while hard at work through its allied institutions can grow into a goliath of hardcore discursive practice that it may no longer need an apparent enforcing mechanism as the complex individual parts gain enough momentum to self-sustain.

Now, for the actual set of tools utilized in the research in hand, Carla Willig's methodology has been adopted. It systematizes FDA from Parker's *Discourse Dynamics* (1992) and formulates analytical model that investigates discourses. Her model is ideally suited to the study of the novels chosen for this study as the analytical tools progressively map discourses in the novel informed by the research questions and attempts to account for the resulting subject positions and volte-faces in the lives of the female characters in the novels in connection with discourses around marriage and gender subjectivity. FDA holds that discourses 'facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when' (Willig 12). FDA as a model that focuses on the given discursive resources within a culture forming a 'discursive economy' and its implications for those who live within it. Willig agrees with Parker's (1994) view of discourse as 'sets of statements that construct objects and an array of subject positions' (Parker 245). The identification all the instances of the stances, the pattern and mode of their occurrence and listing of factors that make them powerful aids in explication of the research questions formulated for this study.

Willig argues discursive constructions 'make available certain ways-of-seeing the world and certain ways-of-being in the world. Discourses offer subject positions, which, when taken up, have implications for subjectivity and experience' (113). Identification of the discourses is key as FDA takes up issue with discourses that privilege those versions of social reality that validate 'existing power relations and social structures' (113). Willig contends that the very nature of language affords a silver lining in the sense that 'alternative constructions are always possible' and unearthing of set patterns can bolster counter discourses that may be a force for the good and effect social change (114).

Additionally, a characteristic component of FDA germane to the study at hand, is that it examines the role of institutions for sustaining discourses as Willig notes that Foucauldian discourse is distinguished by the way it studies the relationship of dominant discourses and institutions that seek validate them. Thus, discourses are not just modes of speaking or writing, but have a close relationship with institutional practices and the way they 'organize, regulate and administer social life' (113). Therefore, discourses 'legitimate and reinforce existing social and institutional structures, these structures in turn also support and validate the discourses' (113). A close examination of the ways discursive

practicse function with regard to marriage is an attempt to unravel deeply ingrained social control mechanisms that feed those discourses, thus sustain their self-replicating machinery. They have a role to play into setting up portraits of the characters for themselves. It then becomes exceptionally hard for the subject position to wiggle out of the tight discursive control without a conscious effort at a counter discourse. This becomes possible only when the constitutive elements of discursive practice are better understood in the episteme of their production. FDA, through its explication of the mechanisms involved into discourse construction, may supply tools to redirect the discursive thrust.

As with Parker (1992), Willig is of the view that a critical realist position orients us in such a way that our knowledge and experience are ultimately discursively constructed consequent upon partaking in reigning discourses of time. Hence, discursive constructions of reality are not 'free-floating but that they are grounded in social and material structures, such as institutions and their practices' (130). FDA then studies discourse and its role in forming subjectivity and the body of ensuing practices, along with social structures that host these discursive practices. It also accounts for our radius of subjective thought and potential for action in each set of material conditions (Willig 113).

1.2. Critical Discourse Analysis and FDA

Foucault's idea of discourse takes it beyond discourse as understood in the field of Critical discourse analysis. In CDA, discourse is defined by Wodak and Meyer as 'the flow of knowledge, and/or all societal knowledge stored throughout all time which determines individual and collective doing and/or formative action that shapes society, thus exercising power' (34). Foucault unravels the minutia of the building blocks of discourse as understood in the above sense by challenging notions of 'knowledge', 'power' and the individual as the subject. For Foucault discourse can be confronted, refigured, and then set to motion once more with different formative elements for power and knowledge dynamics as understood erstwhile. In the case of the characters in the novels chosen for this study, a constant struggle occurs at the subject level when they must negotiate discourses which construct social realities and form personal identities for them, and their range of action is governed by the nature of subjective influence from dominant

discourses. The contextual period of the novel and their historical epistemic space affects how they resort to and resist counterintuitive discursive practices.

Historically speaking, critical discourse analysis emerged in 1970s and gained significant pace as a form of textual and discourse analysis that viewed language as instrumental in shaping power relations. The field is indebted to the works of Fairclough, Wodak, Fowler and Kress and Hodge. Critical Discourse Analysis derives its strength through its diverse analytical toolkit as it combines discourses with socio-cultural and textual elements. It is interdisciplinary as it embraces other disciplines i.e., linguistics. Semiotics, and cultural studies to gain deeper insights into the formation and validity of discourses that have consequences for power relations and knowledge production (Wodak, 11). The characteristic of Critical Discourse Analysis that sets it apart is that it recognizes and takes into consideration factors beyond language such as culture and ideology and explores their role into forming and naturalizing norms. Wodak and Chilton posit that any serious textual analysis should not limit itself linguistic investigation only but has to account for socio-cultural structures and their complex relationship with the text being so examined (124).

Norman Fairclough's spin of Foucauldian discourse helps to merge them closer as the former credits discursive relations as a catalyst that not only seeks to sustain and reproduce social reality but also reconstitute gender relations and ideas of subject, knowledge, and power relations (*Discourse and Social Change,* 19). He regards Critical Discourse analysis in his book of the same name as an approach that examines the relationship between discursive practices and wider social and cultural power structures and that their complex relationship and 'how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles on account of power and how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor in securing power and hegemony' (132). Keeping this in view, it begs the idea that the worldviews of the characters in the three novels do not stem from some 'objective' truth but as versions of reality that are invariably the products of the discourses of the time. It is within this premise that character self-regulate their actions. thoughts and attitudes towards issues in conformity with the force of discourses that control them.

For something to be natural and the other to be taboo is strictly defined with this worldview. Thus, in essence critical discourse analysis is concerned with 'production of reality that is performed by discourse' (Wodak & Meyer, 26). As in Foucauldian discourse, critical discourse analysis does not seek to make claims on objective reality and ultimate truth but is more concerned with investigating the processes that form discourses on all aspects of human life, which continue to regulate human conduct and their ideological toolkit. These discursively produced realities get to decide as to what is natural and acceptable and what is unnatural and immoral (Jorgensen & Phillips 26).

Given that discourses govern external reality of the characters so examined, changes in the very discourse making process would affect the ensuing worldview and the reality based on it. Wodak and Meyer argue that discursively produced knowledge is essentially reprogrammable (45). While this study has its primary focus on FDA, critical discourse analysis provides an important background for understanding disparate discourse frameworks. The key element to discourse in all its strands remains, as discussed above, is how it is constitutes gender subjectivity and individual identities. FDA accounts for individual conduct, subjectivity construction in case of the characters from the given novels through the multipronged analytical repertoire as laid out by Willig.

Similarly, Fairclough maintains in *Discourse and Social Change* that Critical Discourse Analysis forms one aspect of subject and identity constitution (146). Both Foucault and Critical Discourse theorists regard the subject as a 'an active agent' who engages with and affects discourses as well as an 'ideological effect' of the discursive process. In the capacity of an active agent the subject can either passive comply with subjection or challenge set subjective roles and reroute them through a conscious struggle to break free of that conditioning. This study therefore examines the authors' use of discursive resources where the characters appear as products of the discourses of the period along with their being active agents as challenging or sustaining discourses. The actions on the part of the characters records their engagement with dominant ideological moorings and efforts to reset the control mechanisms towards personal independence. Just like discourses, the identities of characters are affected by the specific situations that they encounter and go through changes according to the environment of stimulus. Therefore, discourses examined for the purposes of this study are always ideologically influenced.

An ideology is defined by Fowler in *Literature as Social Discourse* as 'a theory, a system of beliefs which has come to be constructed as a way of comprehending the world (28). For Fowler, the use of language serves as natural corollary for the production of ideology. It is a function that is ongoing and inexorable going hand in hand with language use (29). The only means of totally eradicating language, if it were possible, would be to be subsumed by another ideology. This understanding of ideological position is crucial for unearthing meanings and the authors' perspective chosen for this study and their treatment of the discourses under examination. Discourse analysis comes in handy as it equips researchers with the tools to interpret discursive constructions by decoding ideologies. Discourse modifies, constitutes, and maintains meanings and connotations of external reality when it is utilized as an ideological practice. It can either take the form of an active resistance where the characters break the conventional mold and assert control or, instead, the discourses keep their hold and define the life trajectories for the characters so involved, with the character spending their lives at the mercy of control mechanisms defining their subjectivities. This strand of thought, however, allows for possibilities of resistance in the face of entrenched ideological hold. This way, any form of resistance when exercised emerges as a deliberate act to counter ideological authority.

FDA emphasizes the dynamic nature of discourse production and views it as in interconnected process where one element affects the outcomes in the other. Foucault states in *The Order of the Discourse* 'discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle' (53). Therefore, FDA becomes instrumental in our study insofar as it seeks to account for dominant sociocultural structures ad their symbiotic connection with the power relations that determine gender orientations and form subjective viewpoints in the characters so analyzed in the given novels. This process subsequently aids to uncover ideologies that fuel this discursive struggle in the characters of the novels. The discursive structures coupled with their aligned ideological force influence how characters come to terms with their specific social realities. Therefore, gender subjectivity has direct bearing on myriad life situations, matrimonial commitments and in terms of determining its course for gender relations. FDA examines the specificity of gender orientations and why or how gender subjectivities produce conflicting discourses. That process brings into closer focus

all the elements that sustain discursive practices and paring into their constitutive parts then may yield a deeper understanding towards the oscillating and at time conflicting subjective positions adopted by the characters so examined.

1.3. Analytical Stages of Foucauldian Discourse

A six-stage analytical model based on FDA has been formulated by Willig (2008). This model, as developed by the author, applies Foucault's integrated concepts of ideological forces around discourse and how they symbolically reinforce each other. Willig has broken it down into the following analytical stages:

I. Discursive Constructions
II. Discourses
III. Action Orientation
IV. Positioning
V. Practice
VI. Subjectivity

FDA can be conducted on any texts wherever there is meaning. It does not limit itself to the mere words on the pages but incorporates all symbolic system. Parker suggests in *Discourse Dynamics* that we 'consider all tissues of meaning as texts' (8). This model by Carla Willig equips the analyst with the tools to map and locate all the discursive resources underpinning a text. It makes visible subject positions that the texts contain and investigates the range of available subject positions in a given set of discourses. The stages of the model are outlined below.

Stage 1: Discursive Constructions

This stage of the model explores the ways in which discursive objects are constructed. The choice of discursive objects is governed by the research questions. This stage aids in locating discourses around marriage and gender subjectivity in the three selected Victorian novels. This would involve a close and in-depth examination of the instances of multiple ways the discourses of marriage and gender subjectivity are constructed by the authors in their respective novels. In order to effectively map the different references of this discursive object, all its relevant permutations are highlighted.

Instead of merely focusing my attention to the charting of key words around the discursces of marriage and gender subjectivity, all other instances where the authors make implicit and explicit references are duly noted. Narrative techniques utilized in the books are analyzed with relation to their role in the construction of discourses.

This first stage examines the mode of construction for the discursive objects. The process is guided by the research questions. In this case, discourses around marriage and construction of gender roles are highlighted (115). This identifies the different ways these are constructed in the three novels under analysis for the purposes of our study. It records all instances of implicit and explicit references, not just 'keywords' (115). The absence of or lack of direct reference may explain a lot about construction of discursive objects.

Stage 2: Discourses

In the second stage of analysis, after identifying all sections of text that contribute to the construction of the discursive object i.e., the institution of marriage and gender role construction, this stage examines the particular mode of construction and handling discourses and how the authors tackle the same discourses and to what effect, and how unique socio-cultural, political, and religious vantage points alter or sustain the discourse making dynamics.

Moreover, this stage affords a lens to view discursive practices through locating any differences between modes of constructions. This stage primarily focuses difference with regards to discourse constructions and objects of construction within 'wider discourses' (115). For the purposes of this study, disparate discursive constructions of discursive object (institution of marriage and female subjectivity) are analyzed within wider cultural discourses. The female protagonists' use of language and its dependence or otherwise on dominant patriarchal structures is explored in this section through mapping the discursive practices on marriage and gender subjectivity.

Stage 3: Action orientation

In action orientation section of Willig's model, all the discursive contexts that facilitate, hinder or are affected by the construction of discourse object are examined. The factors for this particular mode of constructions and locating them in the environment of

origin/occurrence in the three novels takes primacy at this stage of analysis. The references to discursive objects are to be analyzed within the surrounding text in the novel and then contrasted with the circumstances of their occurrence in the other two novels along the same discursive object. This stage aids in the analysis that given the set of circumstances and ideological orientation; the characters are poised for a certain potential for action.

This analytical orientation is called action orientation and it is crucial for understanding the influences of discourses and forming subject positioning. Every incidental context and the molding of the plot affords multiple discursive orientations, all with their peculiar scope for action orientation. According to Willig, concentrating on action orientation enables us to gain sharper insights into what the various constructions of the discursive object are capable of achieving within the text (116). This stage aids in illustrating objectives for 'constructing the object in this particular way and this particular point within the text' through a critical evaluation of the contexts where different discursive constructions are possible (116). Furthermore, it should put into perspective the functions of this mode of discourse constructions their relation to the surrounding text under analysis. This stage of the evaluation explores the potentialities of action on the part of the characters in relation to the emerging discursive output.

Stage 4: Positionings

The *positioning* stage explores the multiplicity of subject positions in the texts of the novels. Once the various constructions of discursive objects within the wider discourses have been located, relevant subject positions can then be identified. According to Davies and Harre` a subject position within a discourse is 'a location for persons within the structure of rights and duties for those who use that repertoire' (1999: 35). Discourses in the Foucauldian sense constructs subjects as well as objects. This results in a network of meaning that contain the subject positions. It orients actors into particular ways of seeing the external world (Willig 117). A subject position is different from a role as it assumes discursive locations or ways of engagement rather than a random part to be played. As per FDA, roles can be performed without subjective identification, while aligning with a certain subject position plays a key role in forming subjectivity. As Willig explains,

> The subject positions contained within them open up or close down opportunities for action. By constructing particular versions of the world, and by positioning subjects within them in particular ways, discourses limit what can be said and done (117).

Stage 5: Practice

This stage examines what the characters can or cannot do (possibilities for action) given the subject positions they align with. It is an exploration of discourses and the network of available practices. If the discourses facilitate or hinder certain positions or open up or close opportunities of action for them. When confined to certain versions of reality and subject positions within the texts of the novel, it analyzes to what extent they are chained or liberated by the discourses. To Willig, 'certain practices become legitimate forms of behavior from within particular discourses. Such practices in turn reproduce the discourses that legitimate them (117). It is particularly important to gauze the scope of action for the characters as those practices multiply similar strands of practice and continue legitimizing them.

Stage 6: Subjectivity

The final stage analyses subjectivity by viewing it in its relationship with discourse. Subjectivity, with regards to the study at hand, is the culmination of dynamic relationship of all the previous six stages of FDA as discussed above. It is formed consequent upon conditions and discursive objects located in the texts of our novels. Discourses construct social as well as psychological realities and discursive positioning plays a key role in this process (117). According to Davies and Harré, while adopting a particular position,

> A person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines, and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned (1999, 35).

In short, this stage of analysis traces the consequences from the first stage of the analysis to the constitution of subject subjectivity consequent upon the various subject positions informing characters subject experience. Willig maintains that the *Practice* stage defines what can be said and done from within different discourses, while this stage

identifies what can be felt, thought, and experienced from within various subject positions (118).

Now after having outlined the theoretical framework of the study, and having delineated disparate schools of thoughts on FDA, the ensuing chapter seeks to examine the first of the three novels selected for the study i.e., *The Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James in the light of the above discussion. It is analyzed in line with the analytical model as developed by Carla Willig. The novel is analyzed in relation to the study questions and the research objectives. The discursive objects of marriage and gender subjectivity are studied through Willig's model of Foucauldian discourse.

CHAPTER 2

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY BY HENRY JAMES

This chapter of the dissertation analyses Henry James' novel *The Portrait of a Lady* through Foucauldian discourse by a stepwise application of the six-stage analytical model as devised by Carla Willig. *The Portrait of Lady* offers a vast landscape of late nineteenth century discourses that form the subjectivity of its protagonist, Isabel Archer. Henry James wrote his novel in a serialized format from October 1880 to December 1881 in The Macmillan's Magazine and The Atlantic Monthly (Haralson and Johnson 97). Henry James made many revisions to the the original text of *The Portrait of a Lady* for the New York Edition [1] and had called it a 'a large building' under construction along with frequent use of architecture symbolism (Zacharias 410) and in his 1908 preface to the novel he employs the 'house of fiction' metaphor (Taylor 76). The novel is generally regarded as his uncontested masterpiece in a vast literary repertoire (Bosanquet 138). It chronicles the intellectual journey of the protagonist of the novel Isabel Archer who embarks on a sojourn to 'affronting her destiny' (James 18).

The chapter seeks to demonstrate how the discursive object of marriage in the *The Portrait of Lady* plays a crucial role in shaping, molding, and constructing a gendered subjectivity through an interconnected modular analysis of identification of the discursive object of marriage in the text of the novel, mapping all the different permutations on that particular mode of discourse construction that facilitate the formation of that discourse. It studies the discursive economy of marriage and gender subjectivity within the landscape of the novel from characters and the style of the author (*discourse construction*), availability of actions stemming from that mold of construction (*action orientation*), the identification of the subject positions (*positioning*), scope and limits for courses of action (*practice*) and, finally, what form of subjectivity is realized through the effects of the above stages, (*subjectivity*).

[1] This edition was published 1907 in 24 volumes. Henry James wrote 18 prefaces that reflect his critical evaluations of different aspects of literary theory on his works and fiction in general.

Written in 1882, *The Portrait of Lady* is chronologically the first text of analysis, followed by *The Odd Women* (1893), *Jude the Obscure* (1896). This chapter also provides a historical context of the novel followed by discussion of marriage and gender as thematic constructs of the text in the in the backdrop of the late Victorian era and the salient ideals of the age and then the analysis of the above through Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as adumbrated in the previous chapter on methodology. The novel at hand has been as the the 'first extended fictional treatment of marriage after courtship' (White 62). Similarly critic MaComb notes that Isabel, as cornered in a loveless marriage with Osmond, is forced to review her erstwhile notions of liberty and her belief in individual agency in the face of 'external influences' (135). In a broader sense, *The Portrait of a Lady* investigates questions of 'marriage, sexuality, gender, family relations, and national differences' in the backdrop of late nineteenth century concerns with the 'woman question' (Haralson and Johnson 104). Moreover, Edel in his *The Myth of America in The Portrait of a Lady* comments that Isabel's ideals of independence and liberty lose their ground as there is an incompatibility of personal naivete and personal independence (14). Meissner argues that it was in the process of writing *The Portrait of a Lady* (while penning Isabel's meditations in chapter forty two) that James experienced an 'epiphany' towards the idea the the novel form can function as 'vehicle for self-discovery' (Meissner 3).

A recurring theme in the works of Henry James is the explication of originality, democratic spirit and independence of mind and contrasting it with the decaying, old world values of quotidian wisdom, and rampant duplicity coupled with the corruption of Europe. The old order and aristocratic culture depicted in his vast literary repertoire is contrasted with originality of his native land (Hadley 26). The appeal of James was not local but transgressed boundaries and continents and his popularity kept on growing with the revival of interest in his works in the mid twentieth century. His depiction of characters was powerfully acute and thus succeeded in creating lifelike characters. His style of writing was his own and over the years, especially evident in his last three works, The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bow that his prose got denser and more complex at times evading comprehension. He was an undisputed master of his craft and and master practitioner of the art of novel. James' consummate study of character,

psychological observations came to their fruition in his 'the masterpiece of his literary prime, *The Portrait of a Lady* (Bosanquet et 172).

2.1. Henry James and The Portrait of a Lady

Henry James, the author *The Portrait of Lady* was an American born writer who later became a naturalized citizen of England upon the forsaking of his American nationality as a protest against the United States for not joining the second World War (Haralson & Johnson 18). He was born into a learned family and his father, Henry James senior, was a well-respected clergyman and an intellectual. The intellectual strain was also rife in the James siblings as well; his elder brother William James turned out to be a noted philosopher and a highly influential psychologist. Alice, his younger sister emerged as prominent diarist. The James' family travelled extensively across Europe with their father. Henry James spent most of his adult life in England and France for over 20 years (*Ibid*). His extensive travels furnished him with substantial material for his works, both in fiction and non-fiction.

A frequent theme of his novels is the experiences of the Americans living in the continental Europe. Although initially his writing dabbled in shorter texts and contribution to the magazines, his style took its distinctive Jamesian hallmark with his later works of short stories and novels noted for their long and complex plotlines. Despite his elaborate character portrayals and insightful psychological novels that pierce through human nature and consciousness, he had a select circle of friends and remained socially awkward. He was nonetheless prolific writer who went on to author 20 novels and a great many short stories and letters. He breathed his last in 1916 after having suffered a stroke a few months ago. James' writing career is divided into three phases. In his first phase he wrote *Roderick Hudson* (1875), *The American* (1877), *Daisy Miller* (1878) and the *Europeans* (1878). It was also in this period that he authored the novel chosen for this thesis, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and followed it with the *Washington Square* (1881).

In the second phase of his writing started with his The Bostonians (1886), The Princess Casamassima (1886), *The Tragic Muse* (19890), *The Spoils of Poynton* (1887), *What Maisie Knew* (1887), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), In the Cage (1898) and The Awkward Age (1899). His his final phase of authorship, he produced memorable but

extremely dense novels i.e. *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and finally penning his last major novel, *The Golden Bow* (1904). Although James Joyce and Virginia Wolfe further developed and perfected the technique of stream of consciousness, it was indeed Henry James who emerged as a forerunner of the form with close examination of inner psychological workings of his character, laying bare their innermost motivations.

As Henry James was an avid traveler of Europe, his experiences find expression in his works and are a salient characteristic of his novels. His style often involved comparing and contrasting innocence, liberalism, openness as characteristics of New World, i.e. America versus the decadence or sophistication of of the European Old World. *The Portrait of a Lady* is no exception to James' this peculiar style of writing and involved an exploration of the lives of Americans living in Europe. In the late Eighteenth Century, European travel, by crossing the Atlantic, was the mainstay of American tourism. Following the Civil War, the fortunes of Americans grew as the economy flourished and and they turned their attention to foreign travel, especially travelling to Europe and seeking permanent residence there. Henry James was a regular socialite in the elite circles of England. He found himself in the awe of British aristocracy and would frown upon public movements for democracy. According to Haralson & Johnson His attitudes towards aristocracy and rigid social institutions also found expression in *The Portrait of a Lady.* Aestheticism, an artistic movement of the period that championed 'art for art's sake' demonstrate their influence on James as evident in the characters of Ralph Touchett and Gilbert Osmond who value works of art for their aesthetic beauty alone. The protagonist of the novel, Isabel Archer is generally believed to have been inspired by Minnie Temple, James' spirited and lively cousin who died young at the age of 24 (19).

The relative quiet and peace of James' early years helped in polishing his style and and continued to pen an inordinate number of articles, book reviews and shorter fiction for about ten years before he set himself to the task of drafting a novel. He went again to Europe as an adult in 1869 and spent time visiting Italy, France and England and these trips cemented his love for future travels. He was master of observing humans from a distance and took pains to avoid close and lasting friendships and his close friends were really few as he tended to be a social recluse foe much of his life and avoided direct

involvement. This was despite the fact that he had an amiable personality and would get on well with people when required. He experimented with where he could live better off, either his home country America or sojourning Europe, finally settling in the favor of the later (Graham. 53).

James' *The Portrait of a Lady* stands out in his repertoire of works, along with *The American, The Europeans* and *Daisy Miller* and for its masterful and at the same time perspicacious description of Americans living in Europe and succeeds in painting a canvas that offers an uncanny appraisal of what it means to be an American and character characteristics that set them apart, and his having personally experienced the same before engaging them in his fiction (Graham 55). *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) published in three volumes is the masterpiece of his first phase of writing. James recounts the psychological journey of Isabel Archer, a young girl from Albany New York who refuses to be cast merely as a candidate for marriage and insists upon her freedom of spirit and independence of choice borne out of, chiefly, her upbringing in America by a father who lost his wife early on. Isabel is very conscious of her independence and declares unequivocally when feeling herself cornered with 'I'm very fond of my liberty' (51). Isabel has self-educated herself through huge number of books in her paternal grandmother's library and having thus developed a racy imagination that James describes as below:

> Her imagination was by habit ridiculously active; when the door was not open it jumped out of the window. She was not accustomed indeed to keep it behind bolts; and at important moments, when she would have been thankful to make use of her judgement alone, she paid the penalty of having given undue encouragement to the faculty of seeing without judging (66).

Thus, Isabel embarks on a journey to face her destiny in the Victorian world. She says she does not want to be ordinary as underscored when talking to Casper Goodwood upon his second proposal of marriage, 'I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me' (James 232).

Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* opens at Gardencourt in England. We meet an old English Banker, Danial Tracy Touchett having tea in front of his impressive villa of Gardencourt. He is joined by his son Ralph Touchett and their English neighbor Lord Warburton. Old Touchett, an American settled in England, has been a banker for the much

of his life. He has a son, Ralph Touchett who is dying from a consumptive lung disease and his wife, Lydia Touchett who spends most of time living away from her husband in Italy and France. The protagonist of of the novel, Isabel Archer, is a niece of Mrs. Touchett and travels to England with her aunt after the death of his father. Isabel Archer is known to be fond of her independence and filled with desire to experience the world in accordance with her own ideals. She is not in pursuit of marriage offers as she turns down marriage proposals from Casper Goodwood, her American admirer from Albany, New York and a second proposal from Lord Warburton, her English suitor who is smitten with Isabel in his first meeting with her for the first time. Ralph Touchett, her cousin, admires for her originality and her sense of personal independence. It is Ralph who convinces his father to alter his will and leave Isabel a sum of 70,000/- pounds. As he tells his father 'I should like to put a little wind in her sails ' (259). Thus making her tremendously rich.

Following her this sudden leap into riches, Isabel Archer is left bewildered and encouraged by Ralph to use her newfound monetary independence to explore the world 'Don't ask yourself so much whether this or that is good for you. Don't question your conscience so much - it will get out of tune like a strummed piano (311). However, Isabel becomes entangled in a loveless marriage with Gilbert Osmond who seduced her through the sly machinations of his ex-lover Madam Merle with whom he already has fathered a child, his daughter Pansy. Isabel learns the true nature of the relationship of her husband and Madame Merle when it is too late. She however develops a genuine affection for Pansy and comes to regard her as prisoner as she regards the convent where Pansy is kept by her father as ‘a well-appointed prison; for it was not possible to pretend Pansy was free to leave it’ (374). Finally, despite a fresh offer of marriage from Casper following Ralph’s death, Isabel returns to the loveless marriage with Gilbert Osmond. It is intriguing as to what directs the course of destiny of Isabel Archer. She develops from her initial romantic presumptions to a woman whose subjectivity is shaped by networks of meaning beyond her control. A young woman of meagre means with deep cherished convictions and her sense of independence is challenged as she agrees to marry Gilbert Osmond, whom Mrs. Touchett regards as ‘obscure American dilettante, a middle-aged widower with an uncanny child and an ambiguous income’ (377). She nonetheless goes on to marry

Osmond against everybody's expectation and having turned down two suitors, Casper Goodwood and from an English lord, Mr. Warburton.

The idea that literary works are conducive to multiple ways of interpretation finds common ground with the author of this work as well. James is averse to there being a key to the *The Portrait of lady* or any work of fiction in general as he maintains in the preface of the book that 'the house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million - a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will' (15-16). The moment all the pieces of the puzzle fall in place for is manifests her limitation of scope of action for her. It is crucial moment of lucidity where 'a spell of recognitions' come crashing down upon her akin to the sudden 'identification of a pirate' (James 28). While musing alone by the fire in chapter 42, Isabel realizes her confidence in her independence may have been misplaced. She had 'suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end' (572).

As Parker notes, representations of the world constructed by discourses' have a reality almost as coercive as gravity, and, like gravity, we know of the objects through their effects (*Discourse Dynamics* 8) and their palpable force is triggered by society's well-established parameters that limit individual action. How the subject comes to regard itself is influenced by ideological control mechanism of disciplining institutions that police seemingly independent conduct. The institution of marriage comes with its own code of conduct and works its influence, thanks to the already established value systems. This research has utilized a Foucauldian lens for analysis of the discursive object of marriage in tandem with gender subjectivity in the *The Portrait of a Lady*. The research tools so applied aid in the explication of Isabel Archer's character and examine if she battles the force of conventions or mounts a resistance by the power of her gendering self or forced to conform with discursive power structures and submitting as Foucauldian docile body (*History of Sexuality* 131-143). Therefore, this chapter attempts to examine what James called 'process of logical accretion' that play a role in gradually shaping her character as she finds herself 'endowed with the high attributes of a subject' (James 18).

2.2. Marriage and Gender in the *The Portrait of a Lady*

The Portrait of a Lady can be viewed as treatise on the discourses of marriage in the Victorian society and their role in constructing a gendered identity. The references in the text of the novel to all the dysfunctional and failed marriages bear testimony to this line of reasoning. The author's depiction of marriage compares it to a 'cage' (464) where once caught escape becomes almost impossible given the discourse on marriage at the time. The husband therefore turns out to be a tyrant who protected by the patriarchy.

In the very opening scene of the novel Mr. Touchett, Ralph, and Lord Warburton taking their tea in front of Gardencourt and muse over the question of falling in love and marrying. Lord Warburton declares he is not 'keen about marrying' but is open to change his stance if he happens to meet an 'interesting woman' (41). Isabel, soon after arrives at Gardencourt and becomes the woman of interest. The broken marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Touchett (living apart in England Italy respectively) underpins James' implication that though marriage holds up as a discursive institution, it is nonetheless devoid of any physical, psychological development for many people (White 63). Haralson and Johnson suggest that dysfunctional marriage between Osmond and Isabel serves to illustrate the fact that marriage is an institution functions as a 'as a debilitating social convention' that not only limits gender subjectivity but also causes them active harm (106). To White, the engagement of sexuality within *The Portrait of a Lady* is constrained by the values of nineteenth century Victorian England. It relies heavily on metaphors to drive home its message i.e. Isabel's desire for personal liberty can stand for 'a type of sexual freedom' (70).

Isabel's pursuit of liberty as a Victorian woman is defined by a constant struggle for the pursuit of individual liberty and an effort to deny one's sexuality so as to gain 'equal footing with men' in the face of 'changing sexual ideology' in late 19th Century (Hochenauer 19–20). The ending of the novel is again illustrative of James' idea of institutional marriage. The choices that we make determine the scope of subjective action. Although she publicly paraded her love for liberty, circumstances get the better of her and she transformed into 'the custodian of domestic organization' (Niemtzow 380– 381). According to Dorothy Berkson *The Portrait of a Lady* underscores that cultural forces

trump individual aspirations and women are impeded in their quest to gain life experiences that hone their judgement by their captivity into marriage that blunts growth (68– 69). It is an account of incompatibility of individual aspirations for liberty and and the discursive limitations engendered by late 19th century cultural mores. *The Portrait of Lady* , thus yields a wide discursive arena that encompasses the institutional forces, social conventions, and ideological control mechanisms turn Isabel into somebody she absolutely abhorred i.e.,'a mere sheep in the flock' (232).

In Victorian society women were expected to marry and take care of their husbands and remain bound to the household chores and there was no escape in sight. It was operating from this reason that young unmarried girls were expected to learn skills i.e., sewing, cooking, and cleaning as apprenticeship for their future roles as housewives. Even acquisition of knowledge was beyond their domains. Critic Altick maintains that women were always considered inferior to men, and it was generally agreed upon that her place was the home and not the world of affairs (54). Furthermore, according to Charles Petrie, what was most expected of women was to demonstrate innocence or at least make an outward show of it. Men preferred women who had no opinions of their own, appeared weak and exhibited a general ignorance of the world (184). Commenting on Victorian worldview, Gillespie maintains that duty, respectability, 'commercial success, middle-class morality' formed the cornerstone of 'Victorian consciousness' (5).

Broadly speaking, marriage as a theme is intricately woven into the text of *The Portrait of a Lady.* Even the first and second chapters of the novel end with Mr Touchett toying playfully with the idea that lord Warburton should take care not to fall in love with Isabel Archer, 'you mustn't fall in love with my niece' (41). She has just arrived from the United States with her maternal aunt Mrs. Touchett. As a young girl of independent ideas and a piercing active imagination, Isabel Archer treasures her liberty and is filled with desire to experience the world on her own terms. She is idealistic and desirous to court the unknown as she points to Henrietta that her idea of happiness is 'a swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see - that's my idea of happiness (237). Nonetheless marriage and suitors pursue her wherever she goes. She has already rejected a marriage proposal from her one of her early admirers, Mr. Casper Goodwood, a wealthy mill owner from Boston. Upon her setting foot in the European continent,

Gardencourt England, an English gentleman, the aforementioned lord Warburton is smitten with her and proposes to marry her which she refuses. It is again early in the novel that we learn that married life of her aunt Mrs. Touchett is far from ideal; she is 'virtually separated from her husband' and spends most of her time away from her husband in separate lodgings in France and Italy (53-54). Isabel Archer charms his cousin Ralph with independence of spirit, and he makes his father, Mr. Touchett alter his will before his death and bequeaths Ms. Archer a substantial sum of money; seventy thousand pounds, making her extremely rich. As it turns out, despite her self-proclaimed love for her liberty and her American provincialism and inexperience of the intrigues of Europe fail to shield her from the machinations of the sinister Madame Merle who successfully conspires to marry Isabel Archer to a good-for-nothing art collector Gilbert Osmond. As it happens, the latter has been the lover of Madame Merle and has a child by her born out of wedlock. Of these, obviously Isabel is unaware and realizes her mistake when it is too late despite the premonitions of her well-wishers, her friend Henrietta Stackpole, her cousin Ralph Touchett and her aunt, Mrs. Touchett. All their appeals and pleas to reason fall on deaf ears as Isabel Archer is by now far too immersed into the charade orchestrated by the scheming Madame Merle. James brings out the ominous aspect of her personality when she tells Gilbert Osmond, 'I don't pretend to know what people are meant for,' said Madame Merle. 'I only know what I can do with them' (334).

Although Isabel cherishes her personal freedom, given the fact that this serves as the rationale operating behind her motives for rejecting the marriage offers from Casper Goodwood and Lord Warburton, both men of substantial means and enviable social standing and in case of the latter, a British lord with immense means and a permanent seat at the British parliament. However James' novel defies reader expectations used to happy matrimonial plots, her protagonist makes one fatal error of judgement and her story is an indictment of incompatibility of gender independence and the union of of marriage. She genuinely believes, through the force of convention and available set of discourses, that she is entering into marriage with Gilbert Osmond out of her own accord. Madame Merle executes her plan and wants Osmond to put Isabel in his 'way' (334). Osmond's views on feminine gender are illustrated by his belief that they can be 'made' and likes what the convent has 'made' of her daughter Pansy (338). Following Isabel's Marriage to Gilbert

Osmond, Ralph is understandably disappointed with Isabel, telling her, 'You were the last person I expected to see caught' and Isabel responds by that she likes her ‘cage’ (463). The former is astounded at Isabel’s transformations and remarks , ‘a year ago you valued your liberty beyond everything. You wanted only to see life' (465). Isabel defends Osmond and likes him for his being so ‘independent’ and ‘individual’ and that he is ‘finest’ she knows (466). On the face of it, Isabel chooses to remain in the loveless marriage as she manifests a desire for adversity so that she can face it. Opting out of the marriage does not square with her ideals. She comes to value the social conventions and the discourse of marriage in the 19th century England and that foreclose the options for her. At seems she has been disciplined to follow the rules.

Isabel’s inner conflict along with sense of personal independence is underscored in her ambivalence in turn down Lord Warburton’s offer of marriage. She battles her inner turmoil and is at a loss as to what to say at his proposal. Jame emphasizes her state of mind by underscoring that Isabel winced from the proposal as ‘she managed to move back into the deepest shade of it, even as some wild, caught creature in a vast cage’ (161). Readers can sympathize with Ralph’s consternation as he learns of Isabel’s betrothal to Gilbert Osmond. After a period of portentous silence, he does broach the topic to Isabel and his disappointment is palpable in his remarks as he is visibly distressed. Addressing Isabel, he laments 'You were the last person I expected to see caught…. Because you're going to be put into a cage’, Isabel’s response that she may like her ‘cage’ (463-464) underscores irrevocable falling for the trap set up by the scheming Madame Merle by her putting Isabel in the way of her ex-lover Gilbert Osmond. This is a clear break from Isabel’s ideal introduced early in the novel making proclamations for her love of independence and personal liberty failing to see through schemes of Madame Merle and falling headlong into a marriage that is guaranteed to vanquish all that she holds dear, an utter annihilation of her sense of subjectivity and a complete sacrifice of personal liberties under the force of social tradition. Being compelled into doing what she regards to be her matrimonial duty as wife.

It may strike one as baffling that Isabel has a different view of things with regards to her expected marriage to Gilbert Osmond. She is rather convinced that she is exercising her full independent faculties, her personal freedom by ‘choosing’ to marry Osmond and

genuinely believes she is furthering a noble cause by aiding Osmond in the pursuit of his aesthetic ideals. It, however, does not take her long to see Osmond's mask fall and gets to know him without the façade that he had put up prior to marrying her. Osmond wanted Isabel to live up to his version of wife. Furthermore, Osmond's views with regards to the female gender is evidenced in his upbringing of his own daughter, having confined her to a convent and seeks to deliberately construct her identity as a gendered subject.

Thus, Isabel's inexperience of the world predispose her towards creating an ideal image of Osmond and deludes herself into the make believe of her own making. She ends up by paying dearly for her follies and is chained to a loveless union with someone who hates her. What Isabel believed to be her own decision in marrying Gilbert Osmond was in fact orchestrated by Madam Merle to the former's total oblivion, only realizing it when it was too late. Isabel nonetheless decides to remain in that loveless union as she genuinely believes she has to perform the duties expected of a wife. By now she has transformed into a subject. She no longer prioritizes her independence and personal liberty but prefers to submit and succumb to a discursively mediated set of conventions championed by patriarchy through it discipling institution of marriage. Her mental state is underscored in her conversation with Ralph where she mentions that she is duty bound to her Osmond despite his vileness. The upcoming section on Foucauldian discourse examines Isabel's subjective worldview and the events that factor into her identity construction.

2.3. Discourses and Discursive Constructions of Marriage and Gender Subjectivity in *The Portrait of a Lady*

Henry James was not oblivious of the discourses on marriage and gender roles of his time from early on in his life. His father, Henry James Sn., was 'one of the more irrepressible, most frequently published, of the nineteenth-century discussants of love and marriage' who frequently wrote on 'the woman business' to redeem the idea of marriage and enable it to 'become garlanded with immortal freshness'(White 60). The last part of the novel underpinning Isabel's moral qualms about leaving her husband and the force of traditions and sanctities of marriage can be credited to author's influence of his father's engagement with the discourses on marriage and gender in the nineteenth century. As Annette Niemtzow quotes him 'among the things I have recently read is father's marriage

paper in the Atlantic-with great enjoyment of its manner and approval of its matter (380). According to Robert White, Marriage has been central to James' world of fiction and in the case of *The Portrait of a Lady* it was the first extended treatment of the subject after courtship. It was affected by and contributed to the nineteenth century discourse on marriage (62). It has been argued that Henry James pioneered the realistic treatment of marriage in fiction and his fiction delved deeper in the discourses of marriage that questioned the institution from the beginning of his literary career (Heilbrun 171). Accordingly, the discursive economy of the period and its subsequent influence on the formation of subjective realities and constructions of individual experiences within the novel illustrate the discourse hierarchies that sustain a particular version of the world.

The Portrait of a Lady is a Jamesian study of what is expected of a woman who is to be a lady. Early in the book we are introduced to a woman who holds marriage as the least of her priorities and is set to exploring the experiences the world has to offer. Isabel is a woman who is not too concerned about the decencies of gender expectations that her sex must live up to. We learn through the narrator that she had her 'own collection of views' concerning the subject of marriage (93). She taught it was vulgar to think too much of it, and it did not deem it unreasonable to live a life of happiness without the company of a 'course minded person of another sex' (93). Her temper seems to be in alignment with her sense of independence, that she took pains to plan her own personal development. She desired perfection and meticulously monitored her own progress (91). However, the very same woman gets finally married, taking great pains to check her own subjectivity for the fear of upsetting the moral compass on the values of marriage. She sees herself as the custodian of the very things she had considered as threats to her freedom.

It does not take long for the reader to sense that Isabel has a romantic perception of the world that betrays innocence and inexperience. It is frequently contrasted by James with Isabel's assertion of the contrary; that she does not want to be held back in life and takes her independence seriously. She is so confident of her point of view that she grounds her rationale for rejecting Lord Warburton's proposal for marriage on it, informing her through her letter that 'We see our lives from our own point of view' (James 176), even declaring to Mrs. Touchett 'I hope very much I may have no more offers for the present. They upset me completely' (198). Thus, her English circle at Garden court is

understandably enthralled by her ‘special take’ on things. Lord Warburton cannot resist her charms despite his promise to Mr. Touchett that he would not ‘fall in love with her’ with his niece (43).

Some key characteristics of Isabel’s personality stand out from the first chapter of the novel. She is unlike the rest, protective of her independence, and entertains an idealistic view of the world and is desirous to expand her experience of it. It is a sense of independence that is closely knit with her love of freedom. This love of freedom comes into motion as she turns down two promising marriage proposals, ‘I don't see what harm there is in my wishing not to tie myself. I don't want to begin life by marrying. There are other things a woman can do’ (217). Her wild imagination is referenced by the narrator as evidenced in the ‘alertness with which she evidently caught impressions’ (49). Mrs. Touchett recognizes early in the novel that Isabel is ‘fond of her own way’ as the latter announces in their first meeting in Albany that she cannot promise to do everything she is told. Her sister Lillian is convinced of her ‘originality’ and is thrilled at the idea of Isabel travelling to London with her aunt so that she could develop her mind. Lillian wishes for Isabel that she is ‘safely married’(63). While in the same instance, Lillian’s husband describes Isabel as someone written in a foreign tongue ‘I can't make her out. She ought to marry an Armenian or a Portuguese' (63). Again in validation of Isabel’s fanciful and romantic views of world, she is filled with excitement when her aunt, upon her first meeting her in Albany New York, mentions the European villas and Isabel wants to know if people have died in those palaces (61).The fascination that invoked in others is also extended to herself. She is predisposed to musings and often given to viewing herself as an ‘abstract entity’. In short, Isabel is not only a portrait of lady, but she is also generally seen as one. Eventually, though it is her inexperience of the world that heralds the grave failure of her married life with Gilbert Osmond.

Isabel’s inability to account for events beyond her control in shaping the trajectory of her life sets well with FDA’s claim that gendered constructions of are influenced by the epistemic discourse on a particular phenomenon. In this case, the power structures of institutionalized marriage that Isabel cannot renounce, acknowledge or even be conscious of. Ms. Archer’s eventual subjectivity stems from the Foucauldian integrated network of ideological anchors around discursive practices that arise from systems of knowledge that

symbolically reinforce each other, thus inexorably replicating discourse patterns. She is convinced she is marrying Osmond for noble reasons and that Ralph would be against it no matter whom she married as it was 'the essence of a marriage to be open to criticism' (495).

It takes Isabel years before she can fully comprehend the gravity of her situation. When it does strike her at last, she is taken aback by the lack of depth in in her romantic ideas. This sudden leap of realization dawns on Isabel by the second half of the novel and she is compelled to accept, at least to herself initially, that she and Osmond 'are strangely married, at all events and that married life for her has been nothing short of 'an awful life' (583). She does experience the specter of life at close quarters as she meditates in chapter 42 of the novel over her miserable married condition with Gilbert Osmond. She is compelled to acknowledge that 'she loved him … a good deal for what she found in him. But a good deal for what she brought him' (575). The reality hits that 'she had mistaken a part for the whole. Ah, she had been immensely under the charm!' (574). She realizes that she must pay for her error of judgment in marrying Osmond believing the 'the sole source of her mistake had been within herself'. Although she later gets to know the full extent of collusion between Osmond and Madame Merle. She, nonetheless, refuses to exonerate herself as she notes 'when a woman had made such a mistake, there was only one way to repair it' was 'to accept it' (547). In FDA, this submission to the power of institutional authority in inherent how the discourses of the period can sustain particular 'ways of organizing, regulating and administering social life' (Willig, 113). Moreover, in line with this theoretical standpoint Isabel finds it hard to extricate herself from 'all the traditionary decencies and sanctities of marriage. The idea of violating them filled her with shame as well as with dread (620). Given that FDA is centered on 'gendered construction of subjectivity, power relations and social practice' (Hollway, 128), it is hard for subjects to avoid submitting to authority as we note that Isabel cannot bring herself to break away with tradition as the secret anxieties of violating them constantly weigh upon her contributing to her misery in a loveless marriage. As she tells her friend Henrietta Stackpole:

> I don't know what great unhappiness might bring me to; but it seems to me I shall always be ashamed. One must accept one's deeds. I married him before all the

> world; I was perfectly free; it was impossible to do anything more deliberate. One can't change that way' (654).

FDA regards institutionalized marriage is one of the top pillars of patriarchal power/knowledge systems that continue to sustain its validity through the dominance of discursive practices that incorporate social conventions, traditions, and fountain heads of moral authority. It is in the third volume of *History of Sexuality, The Care of Self* that Foucault aligns marriage on the same footing as organized religion as a disciplining institution demarcates the parameters socio-cultural discursive episteme (80). According to Judith Butler, one of the inherent vices in the traditional gender/sex binaries of heterosexuality, are the primordial human feelings of jealousy and establishing rights of spousal possessiveness emerge as its natural corollary (43). Foucault regards marriage as one of the many facets of regulatory authority that strives to build ties of kinship for passing on of inherited properties and family titles. It is therefore an alliance that serves to perpetuate the power/knowledge duality that yields it its disciplining power (*The History of Sexuality* 106). Power is invariably directed by a set of socially sanctioned sources, that include the institution of marriage, bonds cultivated through religious affinity and family ties, state sponsored regulatory institutes such as the law enforcement bodies and academies that serve as places of instruction. The marriage question in *The Portrait of a Lady* is a discursive paradigm that serves as an offshoot of discipling institution, which is at play to mold, shape and construct its objects. Configuring the structural map of the novel gives us a rounded portrait of theme of marriage in the novel. For our protagonist to know herself or even going to the extent of identifying herself as individuals is only possible if it is within the confines of the reigning episteme of the time. Carla Willig in her *Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* notes that Foucauldian Discourse Analysis foregrounds the available set of interpretative repertoires that frame the psychological essence of the subjects and it is through the resources of that repertoires as to what the subject can and can say, think and even feel. It is the only means at their disposal to talk about themselves and identify themselves in the wider scheme of things (342). Thus, Isabel Archer's subjective epiphany in the vigil scent of chapter two of the novel enables her to see her situation from a distance and then operate in accordance with her set of choices. It also marks a moment of resistance for her any deviation from exposes its constitutive elements serving as instances of resistance (Potter and Wetherell 169).

The Portrait of a Lady has a vast episteme of value systems that reveals character subjectivity to the dominant discourses operating on an unconscious level. Isabel is not the most steadfast of characters. She, at times finds herself at the mercy of emotions aroused in the moment, often full of contradictions. For instance, as Goodwood reminds her of her promise not to ever marry, she can only passively muster 'No one can be more surprised than myself at my present intention' (451) Again, Foucauldian discourse analysis posits that the leading discourses within the episteme of a particular historical period dictate how the individuals construct their identity and interpret their experiences (Willig 143), Ms. Archer's romanticized views of the do not ring in harmony with the crude realities of her circumstances. Therefore what follows in Isabel is a form of individual subjectivity that has absorbed and internalized the epistemic constructions resulting in a bipolarity of ideal versus the real. This state is illustrated when she is confronted by Ralph on the eve of her engagement with Osmond. To Ralph, she was 'she was grand, but she was highly solicitous; she was indifferent, but she was all in a passion' (473). Ralph, being better endowed with perspicacity in human nature has a hard time believing that Isabel would consent to marry someone like Gilbert Osmond and lashes out that he never thought Isabel would resort to 'keep guard over the sensibilities of a sterile dilettante' (469). As he confronts Isabel with, 'it's not in the least the sort of marriage I thought you'd make.' (466). Isabel responds that Ralph does not know Gilbert Osmond at all and says she likes Osmond for for his being 'independent' and 'individual' and demands to know what Ralph has against him (466). Ralph tries to force upon Isabel that she she is 'running a grave risk', but to him sheer helplessness Isabel retorts that ' 'marriage is always a grave risk, and his risk's as grave as mine' (464).

Isabel's idealism is prefigured in the text when she struggles to justify her marriage to Osmond and sees him in a totally different light. Although Osmond may be 'poor and lonely', he nonetheless and was 'noble' (574). She thought of him as a 'skeptical voyager strolling on the beach while he waited for the tide, looking seaward yet not putting to sea' and she wanted to ' launch his boat for him' (575). Ralph attempts to reason out with Isabel against her marrying Gilbert Osmond, James' afford us a window into Isabel's inner workings of mind when she says she wants to be free to 'free to follow out a good feeling' and Osmond's apparent poverty acts as source of charm for her as she 'that's what she

likes him for', his lake of money (468). To Isabel's mind the opposition that Ralph and her aunt demonstrated against Gilbert Osmond was because that they did not like later and not because of any inherent vice in him (471), and their position therefore did not carry much weight with her. James gives us a portrait of Gilbert Osmond through the association of discreet architecture imagery. His views on women are illustrated through his treatment and apparent imprisonment of of his daughter Pansy. Palazzo Roccanera, Mr and Mrs. Osmond residence in Rome filled the young lover of Ms Pansy, Edward Rosier with sheer hopelessness and brought to his mind images of times when girls were put into convents and 'had been forced into unholy marriages' (492). Despite the protestations of Mrs. Touchett and her conviction that Madame Merle had practically married Isabel to Osmond, she tended to place a greater responsibility on herself. Although, in time she does realize the magnitude of her mistake in marrying Gilbert, she can hardly locate the reasons for her doing so. Too her, it could have been anything from 'nature, providence, fortune, of the eternal mystery of things' that contrived to her having married Osmond (544). As she now came to realize, Osmond had been himself throughout, it was she who had deliberately let herself be blinded by inexperience of the world.

It was Isabel who came to regard her husband as her 'appointed and inscribed master' and strove not to act in defiance to his wishes. This fact filled her with 'incredulous blankness' as she pondered her imagination was weighed down by

> All the traditionary decencies and sanctities of marriage. The idea of violating them filled her with shame as well as with dread, for on giving herself away she had lost sight of this contingency in the perfect belief that her husband's intentions were as generous as her own (620).

For her, someone marrying for money was not abnormal. In her desperation, she wonders if she left all her money to her husband, would he be willing to let her choose her own course of life (695). In an exceptionally illustrative passage that she engages in introspection after she learns how she has been fooled by Madame Merle into marrying her ex-lover Gilbert Osmond with whom she had had a a child out of wedlock. Her state of mind is insightfully captured by the author as follows:

> It seemed to her that only now she fully measured the great undertaking of matrimony. Marriage meant that in such a case as this when one had to choose, one chose as a matter of course for one's husband. 'I'm afraid - yes, I'm afraid,' she said to herself more than once, stopping short in her walk. But what she was afraid

> of was not her husband - his displeasure, his hatred, his revenge; it was not even her own later judgement of her conduct - a consideration which had often held her in check; it was simply the violence there would be in going when Osmond wished her to remain (719).

Deep-set traditions and values with regards to marriage are contested within the landscape the novel. Mrs. Touchett, upon receiving Isabel on her return from Rome to visit his dying cousin Ralph, informs Isabel about the betrothal of Lord Warburton. This is predicated on the tradition that Mrs. Touchett believed that even married women would receive news of their ex-lover's marriage with offence (764). While in England, Isabel is conflicted about her state of affairs and her inability to separate the real from the ideals of discourse is underpinned in what transpires within her. What underpins Isabel's chain of thought as she struggles with the forces of tradition and her resisting self is underscored in the following passage:

> She had a husband in a foreign city, counting the hours of her absence; in such a case one needed an excellent motive. He was not one of the best husbands, but that did not alter the case. Certain obligations were involved in the very fact of marriage and were quite independent of the quantity of enjoyment extracted from it (772).

Our protagonist, Isabel Archer, is forced to navigate through a set of value systems that predate her ontological self. Her worldview is strictly confined by the epistemic limitations of her period. Her gender assumptions are dictated by sociocultural systems of discourses. She chooses to internalize emotions instead of expressing them. Feeling seems to be in ascendency to practicalities. This, naturally has its toll on Isabel as the narrator informs us 'Suffering, with Isabel, was an active condition, it was not a chill, a stupor, a despair, it was a passion of thought, of speculation, of response to every pressure' (572). When read through a Foucauldian perspective, gender as a construct owes a lot to ideological dynamics as well as to a complex vortex of cultural and historical renderings. It clearly breaks away with once incontestable version of gender as dichotomy of binaries that went unchallenged for centuries, as to him this ideology facilitates the work of disciplining institutions in the creation of gendered subjects who accept their lot as 'docile bodies' (*The History of Sexuality* 147). This 'vortex of cultural and historical' renderings determine and define Isabel's understanding of herself and the situations around her. This reading is in line with the idea of socially constructed gender. In a similar vein, regarding the the essence of gender, Judith Butler in her *Undoing the Gender* concurs with

Foucault's idea of gender being indebted to culture and ideology rather a biological given (10). To Butler gender identity takes shape as a consequence of a continuous set of performing the gender as conditioned by dominant socio-cultural norms at play in the given environment, not having anything to do with physiological orientation or anatomical features (*Undoing the Gender* 7*)*. Given the constitutive role of discourses, the prevailing notions of what it means to a wife in matrimonial bond and the ensuing gender roles expected of them, overpower individual aspirations. Discourse takes primacy in this dissertation as as basic tent of Foucauldian understanding of gender regards it as discursive category as is the case with proponent of Critical Discourse analysts. As Fairclough argues in his *Discourse and Social Change* our very senses of ideological perceptions and the parameters of thought are restricted and constructed by the discursive economy that we happen to partake in (03). It is this perception of gendered construction through discourse that makes Foucault claim that subject is essentially a 'function of the discourse', and the creative outlook of the author therefore may be investigated in their wider discursive environs with its attendant complex and contingent web of discourses (*What is an Author*, 138).

Upon closer examination, the prevalent discourse in the Foucauldian sense does indeed play a crucial part in disciplining our female protagonist in James' *The Portrait of a Lady*. Isabel is at pains to do the social duty asked of her within the confines of traditional marriage or take action to assert her independence. At the end of the day, social conventions, proprietary and the latent forces of eighteenth century epistemic discourse succeed in mastering her will to the fulfillment of the forms of a marriage bond. Indeed she does it from her apparent free volition oblivious to the effects of her subjectivity being shaped by the contingent discourses on the institution of marriage.

Discourse and the force of biopower, although invisible as concrete physical forces, are at play when Isabel's character relegates her personal liberty and power of choice or the exercise of resistance and yields as a Foucauldian docile object unconsciously maintaining the patriarchal networks of power/knowledge. She succumbs to the forces of conventions and social authority. It is apparent in her exchanges with Ralph following her engagement with Osmond. She appears to set on deliberately choosing her won abyss. In fact, *The Portrait of a Lady* captures the crude reality of the

Victorian marriage and in the grand scheme of Isabel's vigor forlife, full of wild fantasies for the future, the failed marriages of Mr and Mrs. Touchett represent a failing institution of marriage. It is manifested in Isabel's world of naivete at the beginning of the novel, to her total transformation into a subject bending to form and custom by the end of the novel. The discursive economy on the institution of marriage, thus, effectivity cancels out the coexistence of personal independence of women against the discursive monolith of dominant force of discourse of ideology. Isabel's Archer's journey from independence to subjugation is succinctly captured by Ralph Touchett when she attends to him in moments before death:

> You wanted to look at life for yourself - but you were not allowed; you were punished for your wish. You were ground in the very mill of the conventional!' (770).

Marriage as an institution, complete with its latent forces, ensures compliance in its victims in the shape of the wives and makes them conform with the full force of social convention and customs behind it. Furthermore, it lends credence to the idea that the social construction of gender is at the core of Foucauldian concept of gender subjectivity. The intricate and discursively regulated dsocial norms force gender identity upon the subject and inculcate in them the idiom of the sex as argued by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (23). This is also reinforced by Butler this idea in her *Gender Trouble* that the formative principles of sex emanate from social discourses (122). Therefore, regulatory power, through its disciplining institutions i.e., marriage take up the subject as an apprentice and through the complex web of interconnected discourse mechanism succeeds in forming the subjectivity of the individual. Subjection and regulation therefore go hand in hand (*The History of Sexuality*, 82). Therefore, here we are able to view the discursive practices of the period through the narrative and discursive object of marriage and gender subjectivity in *The Portrait of a Lady*. As Butler argues, that gender categorization gives the appearance of natural and stable, it is actually results from a contingent mode of gender construction that can adopt a number of forms and undergoes change with the tide of discourses. It allows for a number of variations without conformity to the available set of definitions (Butler 22). Coming back to our heroine, Isabel herself cannot be totally exonerated for what eventually befalls her. She genuinely believes in her originality and would not object if people admired her for 'superiority' (89). The narrator notes that 'many

of her opinions has doubtless but a slender value' other than lending of an appearance of a thinking mind blessed with a superior intellect (96). Cultural discourses matter to her and she does conform albeit evaluating them on a slim set of idealistic portraits of the world. However, from early on, Isabel placed much value on what people thought of her and dreaded the thought that 'she should appear narrowminded' (106). Isabel's romanticized views are sharply juxtaposed with what is real and the ideals she was pursuing. She was not quite in touch with reality. She genuinely believes that her adoption of a certain appearance could make it real. She desires that her life 'should always be in harmony with the most pleasing impression she should produce; she would be what she appeared, and she would appear what she was' (91). The cumulative effect of her inexperience mixed with youthful ideals lands her in a marriage that signals her life of misery with Gilbert Osmond.

2.4. Action Orientation

The chain of events in the life our protagonist makes her amenable to a set of the potentialities and their contingent consequences can, according to Willig, facilitate, hinder or affect the construction of subjectivity and gender roles expected of subjects (116). The force of ideology propell her towards an abyss she cannot pull herself out of. Isabel cannot exactly tell why she attracted to Osmond. Isabel's drifting towards her horrible fate with Gilbert Osmond is illustrated in the passage below as she finds herself helpless when confronted with forces beyond her control:

> These things had been absorbed in a more primitive need - a need the answer to which brushed away numberless questions, yet gratified infinite desires. It simplified the situation at a stroke, it came down from above like the light of the stars, and it needed no explanation. There was explanation enough in the fact that he was her lover, her own, and that she should be able to be of use to him. She could surrender to him with a kind of humility, she could marry him with a kind of pride; she was not only taking, she was giving (479).

Isabel's acceptance of what 'came down from above like the light of the stars' is in line with the operations of a coercive force of a disciplining institution that constructs gendered identities without there being a tangible regulatory system. This demonstrates how certain versions of reality are constructed around the characters given exploring the epistemic landscape of the period i.e., late nineteenth century England. This is what

Foucault attributes to the force traditional structures of discourses that orient the subject in one specific mode. According to Foucault, the way discourses are structured plays a vital role in in the subject's comprehension of reality. It is, therefore, those discourses that get to decide what individuals can think and act within the confines of the discourses. The episteme does in fact influence and regulate as to what can be thought and felt. Thus, the resulting conduct is never free from the stronghold of the discursive practices and all action and considerations are filtered through it (*The Archeology of Knowledge* 147). The force of established discourses on marriage and gender subjectivity as examined in the previous section exerts itself on the range of action and subjection position that our protagonist in *The Portrait of a Lady* Isabel Archer could engage in.

Isabel's love for Osmond is based on her ideals of romantic notions of the world with little bearing to actual reality. The exterior displays of forms attract her, and she falls in love with him 'not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed out as honours' (472). She is won over by the outward form of Osmond's pose and mistakes his deception for 'earnestness of his affection' and a mark of his 'personal qualities'. For her, Osmond 'better than anyone else' (576). Ralph was a better judge of character than her young American and knew that 'under the guise of caring only for intrinsic values Osmond lived exclusively for the world' and everything Osmond did was thoroughly calculated. If one were not on the guard, they could easily mistake it 'for impulse' (532). The veracity of Ralph's words is realized as Isabel learns the true nature of her husband's schemes that someone who she 'had supposed to be the least sordid had married her, like a vulgar adventurer, for her money' (695-696).

Isabel's *Action Orientation* is largely contingent on her state of mind, but she did not have the blueprint for the course of her life ahead. The narrator underscores Isabel's psychological state with that her 'consciousness was so mixed that she scarcely knew where the different parts of it would lead her, and she went about in a repressed ecstasy of contemplation, seeing often in the things she looked at a great deal more than was' (392). Her misplaced idealism is apparent to Ralph and Henrietta and the latter declares to Isabel that she is stuck in a world of her dreams having lost contact with the reality, 'you've too many graceful illusions' (304).

Moreover, Isabel cannot extricate herself from her abstract theorizing on life and thus pushed farther from the real and only holding on to the semblance of reality of her own contriving. This has its obvious ramifications for what happens to her. The roots of this may be found in her early years as child who would not look outside her reading room as that would have 'interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side-a place which became to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror' (57). Isabel's deliberate shielding herself from the real takes its toll on her faulty perception of the external reality around her and skews her judgment in people and appearances. Her 'ridiculously active' (66) imagination and extensive reading from her childhood proffer her an alternate reality of things aided by her wild fancies. This makes her susceptible to abstract theorizing. Isabel herself acknowledges to Ralph upon their meeting first meeting Gardencourt that 'I'm said to have too many theories' (86). Even lord Warburton grimly observes that he never 'saw someone who judges 'things on such theoretic grounds' (195). Isabel is not entirely out of reckoning with her feelings as she informs Ralph 'I'm absorbed in myself; I look at life too much as a doctor's prescription' (311).

From a nineteenth century epistemic point of view, *The Portrait of a lady* contends with the discourses of marriage and gender subjectivity in strict compliance with its own regime of truth, influenced by the reigning discursive practices as observed above. Those discursive elements lay bare how it deals with them. Foucault contends in *Power/Knowledge,* the the lifeline of the discourses within a given society, their means of circulation and function are controlled by its politics of truth (126). Truth never operates in vacuum, it rather operates from a blend of the complex discursive practices and power is never separated from it (*Ibid,* 7). It would, thus, stand to reason to ask what actually constitutes an episteme. For Foucault, the intricate discourse constructions are constitutive elements that sustain an episteme (*The Archeology of Knowledge* 214). It is everything that functions as a discourse, as Foucault posits in *The History of Sexuality* the combination of knowledge and truth result from the epistemic environment and are its active constructs that in turn play their roles in regulating the parameters for individual thoughts and psychological action orientation (152). In *The Portrait of a Lady,* Isabel Archer is governed in her conduct by entrenched discourses of a disciplining institution

(the discursive object of marriage) that sanctions the parameters of her action. Similarly, Foucault claims the disciplining institutions engage in complex 'games of truth' and through it they seek to govern the conduct of the individuals and set categories of norms and evils by purporting to be coming from a position of truth (Ibid). Kreitzman further elucidates this idea with the claim than the notions of truth and the culturally sanctioned subjective conduct seek their validity through an interplay of power and knowledge (*Michel Foucault* 117). As a way out of this chaos, Foucault suggests *The History of Sexuality,* that exploring the constituent elements of the 'politics of truth' and disengaging the discursive component that serve to institutions of control, paving the way for destabilizing hierarchical structures giving way to alternative means (133).

It is thus so deeply ingrained in the discursive fabric of the period that it does not leave any window for a different variation of conduct. Being mainly concerned with what can and cannot be done, thought, and felt with consequent for how the subject takes a position as examined in the next section of Willig's model concerning *Positioning*. Foucault, in his unique take on power, maintains that it is a duality of power/knowledge that weds them to an inseparable duo that depend upon each other for generating discourses. It is again this duality of power/knowledge that conditions discourses and makes truth claims on external reality. This is, according to Foucault, in truth the very essence of 'power/knowledge relations' (*Discipline and Punish*, 27). Foucault stresses in *The History of Sexuality* that while discourses are influenced by power, they nonetheless also play a role in creation of power. A scope for resistance is inherent in the very essence of discourse and it can therefore be altered for different effects (101). He is of the view that gender identities specifically flow from entrenched institutions i.e. marriage along with bonds of kinship that enforce codes of ethics and moral checklists to sustain their authority. Sexual morality is discursively regulated through marital unions with women finding themselves at the receiving end of the bargain (147). Women as Foucauldian docile subjects lose their voice and points of resistance upon entering into a value laden institution of marriage and pushed to the peripheries within the confines of their conjugal responsibilities. Marriage is, therefore, an ordained alliance that continues to normalize subjective anomalies of rights and duties against women (106). Thus the *Action Orientation* phase accounts for ideological orientation of Isabel Archer given the

discourses on her gender subjectivity. Her potential for action limited in the presence of ingrained discourse mechanisms which counter attempts to escape them. The mechanics of *Action Orientation* for characters is crucial for understanding the influences of discourses and forming subject *positioning*, which is discussed in the subsequent chapter.

2.5. Positioning

It is pertinent to account for Isabel's *Positioning* within the wider context of the discourses on her subjectivity. As seen the *Action Orientation* phase, her distance from the reality of her situation gets more pronounced with the fatal error of marrying Gilbert Osmond on faulty grounds. So, what drives Isabel's subjectivity? Henrietta traces it to the sources of mere idealism with being 'too infatuated with mere brain-power' (757), and Ralph identifies Isabel's source of misery as 'too much power of thought' (311). This power of thought does not serve as a salve and only tortures her with the grim realization that she had married Osmond based on faulty theory 'in order to do something finely appreciable with her money' (756). Isabel finds it extremely difficult to move past the closely held conviction that she and Osmond 'were married, for all that, and marriage meant that a woman should cleave to the man with whom, uttering tremendous vows, she had stood at the altar' (722). It is revealing that Isabel subconsciously finds herself in agreement with Osmond's declaration that 'I take our marriage seriously... I am not aware that we are divorced or separated; for me we are indissolubly united'. For her, Osmond's words signify 'something transcendent and absolute, like die sign of the cross or the flag of one's country' He spoke in the name of something sacred and precious - the observance of a magnificent form (717).

With the power of her imagination, Isabel is able to create an alternate reality of Osmond based on the appearances and the pose he masquerades in collusion with Madame Merle. She had 'invented a fine theory about Gilbert Osmond, she loved him not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed out as honours' (472). This was Isabel 'meeting the requirements of her' imagination (*Ibid*). Her mind becomes the soft underbelly for Osmond to take full advantage and he was convinced that 'he could tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring' (476). She, despite her leaps of imagination cannot match mind games that Osmond brings to bear on her. She even believes Osmond

is right in considering her 'the most imaginative woman he had known' in their time of courtship, not doubting him for a moment. She had been so completely under his spell of treachery that she fed her 'wonderous vision' of Osmond with her stirred fancy (574). It is no surprise then that Isabel is forced to surrender under the machinations stirred by Osmond's 'demonic vision' (680). As Ralph had rightly judged, her romantic fancy had worked its magic on Isabel that even though she was clearly in the wrong she believed. She was 'was deluded but she was dismally consistent' (472).

Isabel seems to have conjured up a separate world of false realities based on her faulty reasoning, fiery imagination, and prioritizing appearances over actualities. Her inconsistency and irresolution can be traced to an unconscious source as we learn that at times, she sincerely wished that 'she might find herself someday in a difficult position, so that she should have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demanded … her meagre knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic, her temper at once exacting and indulgent, her mixture of curiosity and fastidiousness, of vivacity and indifference' (91). This sets Isabel up as a perfect prey for the cunning manipulation of Osmond and Madame Merle. This combination of her uneven paradigms pushes to her abyss. This is notwithstanding the Foucauldian notion that subjects can take their thought process into account and engaging in critical self-introspection and evaluation that equips them with the prospects of breaking the shackled of their imposed subjectivity and create a difference in the process of their identity construction (*Discipline and Punish 26*). Isabel does engage in critical self-evaluation, but she adjusts her moral compass according to discourses of the time. Her decisions may be at odds with instincts, she nonetheless does what is expected of wife and a woman in her situation. What she holds dear never laid out in concrete terms than a purely fanciful and abstract 'love of liberty' that 'almost exclusively theoretic' (235). She fears 'the idea of diminished liberty' (172) that would curtail her freedom but her overly intellectualized escape plan does little to stem her deep-set insecurity. This very indistinctness of Isabel's individual agency can be viewed in terms of its struggle with the discourses of her age. It is a complex mix of ideas that compete for supremacy without a clear winner. The narrator struggles to identity what triggered her fancies as he notes 'her imagination … hung back: there was a last

vague space it couldn't cross - a dusky, uncertain tract which looked ambiguous and even slightly treacherous (427).

Isabel is conflicted as to what she wants to do. On the face of it, she wants to 'see' without experiencing as he declares to Ralph 'I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself' (217). There is an apparent thirst for knowledge without the accompanying will of execution. She deliberately avoids the darker side of things, preferring to hold on a spectacle rather than playing a part. The fact that 'the love of knowledge coexisted in her mind with the finest capacity for ignorance' does herald a world of unseen trouble for her' (280). Furthermore, even in the moments of reckoning after the full scope of Osmond's treachery reveals itself, she is in the awe of a mind that had trapped her. She is convinced she knew no mind 'more ingenious, more pliant, more cultivated, more trained to admirable exercises' (756), his capacity for deception had caught her unawares and even if there were the occasional glimpses to Osmond's real nature, Isabel soared above with her ethereal loss of perspective and painted him in an entirely different light. Isabel's *positioning* (in terms of her subjectivity and gender orientation) is controlled by her flawed sense of individual independence. Her progressive growth into a settled docile character warrants a Foucauldian perspective of discourse mechanisms. Foucault credits discourse as the dynamic at the center for struggle that asserts itself for domination in forming subjects and trickles down its control mechanisms through institutional control (*The Oder of Discourse* 211). Therefore, the crucial note that Foucault strikes is to maintain that the arena of power/knowledge is an invariable struggle and a scene where discursive practices are constantly contested, and subject positions vary in the light of the relative force of discourse dynamics. Although it is a space which in effect cements subjective positions given the force of its ideological control, Isabel's deliberate submission to her situation in spite of the availability of points of resistance underscores the dominance gender discourse in the nineteenth century.

In relation to Isabel Archer's decision in defying sympathetic voices and opting for options injurious to her interests may therefore emanate from individual conception of the world around. Carla Willig notes that Foucauldian discourse constructs subjects as well as objects which result in a network of meaning that contain the subject positions. It orients actors into particular ways of seeing the external world (117). Moreover, a subject

position within the wider scope of discourse constitutes ‘a location for persons a structure of rights and duties that stem from that particular repertoire (*Davies and Harre* 35). However, it does not necessarily follow that her choices had to be compatible with her actions as subject positions do vary from roles as the former implies a location of discourse for ways of engagement instead or role that assumes the mere playing of a part. Subjective identification is not a prerequisite for playing a role but immersion in a subject position is crucial for shaping of subjectivity. Aligning with certain subject position can open up or close down opportunities for action, as well as putting checks upon as to what can be said and done (Willig, 117). Isabel’s particular *positioning* has consequences for her gender subjectivity as influenced by the discourse of marriage. This interplay of ideological orientation towards the formation of gender identities subsequently hardens into subjectivities. Isabel emerges as self-regulating subject who subscribes to a set of discursively mediated value systems that in effect constitute her subjective worldview.

2.6. Practice

Isabel’s moral impulses exert themselves on her in how she conducts herself. She checks herself and ascertains that she is not in violation of Gilbert Osmond commands. She is forced to reconsider her visits to her beloved but ailing cousin Ralph Touchett. Isabel is apparently bewildered and confused with regards to her conduct in ‘the decencies and sanctities of marriage (620). She has by now made a full transition to her role as Mrs. Osmond. She has finally let go of her ideals and surrendered to what is expected of somebody in her situation: a married woman irreparably distant from her husband. Given her state of mind with regards to social decencies and deeply sensitized to the reigning mores, it does not come as shock that a young woman who once proudly declared that she did not want to begin her life by marrying as there were ‘other things that a woman could do’ (217). Now, she is for for intents and purposes turned into custodian of domestic sensibilities of a good for nothing dilettante. Her scruples about the ethical questions of marriage never leave her and it is apparent that she accepts her miserable life with Osmond convinced that she owes her duties to the institution of marriage. She informs her friends that even if she were ‘were afraid of my husband’ living with him ‘would be simply my duty’ as ‘that's what women are expected to be’ (674).

In the larger scheme of things, Isabel's potential for action is strictly predicated on the contingent factors of discourses at play at constructing her gendered subjectivity. Her misplaced idealism coupled with abstract theocratizing without regard to practical experiences poise her on a course of action to her own detriment. Osmond cloaks his 'morbid passion' (646) in tightly orchestrated appearances calculated to achieving end. During their courtship, Osmond never omits to be at his best possible self; 'graceful and tender, to wear the appearance-which presented indeed no difficulty-of stirred senses and deep intentions' (475). He has mastered the game of appearances as his relationship with Madame Merle is closely hidden under a masquerade. The epiphany in chapter 42 leaves Isabel more conflicted. She presents a site of myriad unresolved emotions and unrealized ideals. Their marriage is, like her husband Osmond, 'a burned-out fire' beyond rescue (584). It is again in this moment of sudden realization that her current misery and loveless marriage 'were a kind of creation and consequence of her husband's very presence' (573). And that Madam Merle had been at the forefronts of the project of Isabel's doom as the former's interest had always been 'identical with Osmond's' (689).

Isabel's state of mind, the latent forces defining her ideology of marriage, provide the reader an enlightening glimpse into her subjective reality. Upon Ralph's death and Isabel's refusal of Casper Goodwood, she is confronted with her next course of action. Now that 'her errand was over; she had done what she had left her husband to do' she had had made a critical decision. She reasons that although Osmond did not qualify as one of the best husbands but 'certain obligations were involved in the very fact of marriage and were quite independent of the quantity of enjoyment extracted from it' (775). This a picture of our protagonist having sojourned from a world of ideals to a figure of a woman convinced in her cause of preserving appearances in a failed marriage and unconsciously strengthening the discourse of discipling institution. Isabel has, in effect, slipped deeper into Osmond's influence and her decision to go back to her husband in Rome is in line with he had told before her journey to Gardencourt that 'we should accept the consequences of our actions' (718). She believes 'marriage meant that a woman should cling to the man with whom, uttering tremendous vows, she had stood at the altar' (723). This is even though she has the benefit of the hindsight with regards to the chain of events that landed her in this situation in the first place. On top of that, she is convinced that

Osmond hates her but cannot break away from the force of tradition and what a woman is expected to do. The fact that she is compelled in her decision to go back to Rome is underscored by her subconscious conflicted self. The very thought of Rome is disagreeable to her, and it accompanied 'a kind of spiritual shudder of Rome. There was a penetrating chill in the image, and she drew back into the deepest shade of Gardencourt' (775). It therefore stands to reason that a confused Isabel oscillates between tradition and individual aspiration and at the end the former triumphs over the latter.

In short, the scope for *Practice* for James' Isabel is thus confined by certain versions of reality and subject positions within the texts of the novel as chained or liberated by the discourses. The subsequent action in her terms of choices to remain in a loveless marriage with Gilbert Osmond despite seemingly better alternatives is the the logical outcome of the subjective orientation on the given discourse. Furthermore, as maintained by Willig that practices in turn reproduce the discourses that legitimate them Eventually the practices multiply similar strands of practice and continue legitimizing them (117). This also finds expression Foucault's *Power/Knowledge*, where he maintains power not only produces subjects, but it is also instrumental in the production of knowledge systems and in it exercise affects social relations (59). This can therefore affect how this interconnectedness of discourse systems confines scope for practice for the subject characters.

2.7. Subjectivity

Within the Victorian episteme of nineteenth century, a woman in an unhappy marriage could not simply turn back and walk out of it as Henrietta suggests Isabel doing towards the end of the novel. The novel invests a lot in the seriousness of the nuptial vows as underscored by Isabel's trepidations about breaking away from the tradition and Osmond's incessant references to their being 'indissolubly united' (717). Isabel does not challenge Osmond on his idea of marriage. She knows he is right as to what it means to married and is left with no recourse then to burying 'her head in a pile of cushions' (723), which can be a symbolic submission to authority and subjective helplessness.

Isabel's apparent letting herself go deeper into the mire of a totally conditioned subject without resistance has raised a fair amount of consternation among critics. For

instance. William Bysshe Stein condemns Isabel as ‘fleshless robot, a contemptuous prig who flaunts her impotent femininity in the guise of innocence’ and that she is ‘obsessed with the abstractions of independence and freedom’ (Stein, 177). She has become more cognizant of tradition and customs. In fact, it can be argued that she is no less than a ‘Pansy’ than she imagines. This corroborated by the fact that on one occasion she does not want Pansy to go outside for an adult conversation with ‘I would rather hear nothing that Pansy may not’ (484). As Ralph would have it, Isabel, for all her initial protestations to the contrary ‘you were ground in thee very mill of the conventional’ (770).

One thing that illustrates Isabel’s ideological self and psychological orientation for what befalls her, is the disparity of her ideas with reality of her situations. Ralph’s prescient remark on his deathbed with regards to Isabel’s fate that she was ‘ground in the very mill of the conventional’ (770), not entirely exonerating her. The reality of the matter as it stood was that Osmond and Isabel as a married couple were ‘perfectly apart in feeling as two disillusioned lovers had ever been but they had never yet separated in act’ (718). As the narrator acknowledges early in the book, Isabel was endowed with a stirring sensibility that separated her from the crude realities of daily life and that ‘depths of this young lady's nature were a very out-of the-way place, between which and the surface communication was interrupted by a dozen capricious forces’ (69). It then does not come as a surprise that Isabel is out of sync with her inner self and functions in a permeant state of conflict, compromise and traditional propriety expected of her. Again, it is the early introduction to the protagonist that defines Isabel’s discursive self. She betrays a troubled consciousness that seeks out voyages but dreads what they may entail. Her inconsistency coupled with her inexperience with abstract notions of the far away and distant oasis of possibly make her an ideal candidate of our study of subjectivity construction, Isabel offers an ideal vessel for the transmission of epistemic discourse on gender role expectations, and she does deliver but to her own detriment and despite her instinctual misgivings as to the infallibility of her chosen course of action. This is validated in part by her nature that sours above the mundane in search of amorphous world of ideals:

> Deep in her soul-it was the deepest thing there-lay a belief that if a certain light should dawn, she could give herself completely; but this image, overall, was too formidable to be attractive. Isabel's thoughts hovered about it, but they seldom rested on it long; after a little it ended in alarms. (94)

Isabel continues to suppress her psychological essence and its attendant toll manifests itself in turning her into a willing martyr in a cause with underpinned by her ambivalence. Her latent wish that 'wish that she might find herself some day in a difficult position, so that she should have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demanded" (91) does finally materialize leaving her no heroine but a victim to form and custom. Although, in Foucauldian philosophy, the subjectivity does not have to be an end call without any possibility for liberation from its stranglehold. In his third volume of *The History of Sexuality: The Care of Self* Foucault postulates that the idea of 'care of the self' embodies the means to free oneself from the socio-cultural systems of values that construct gender categories (18). It is therefore the ethics mandatory to seek a way out towards subjective liberty by subverting disciplining institutions. It affords an opportunity to circumnavigate social and moral self-inflicted policing by challenging the conditions that make up discursive practices by invoking their creative faculties (*The History of Sexuality* 141). To him, the self-policing that goes with subjective identity formation is through invisible effects of biopower. Biopower exists to exerts its control though entrenched discourses through subtle means as it operates from the internalization of oppressive technologies on the part of the subjects therefore creating 'docile bodies' that never contest through state of affairs (139-141). In his *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault maintains that the process of making docile bodies where power relations have an immediate and direct control over, and they make it suffer and perform tasks by its complete hold on the subject (25).

Our protagonist begins her journey of life with a 'hope that she should never do anything wrong' (90), has faltered and had practically 'had thrown away her life' (584). Our heroine has embraced her subjectivity with a realization that a bleak future lay ahead of her and knew she could not escape her fate other than embracing the 'indifference' that 'closed her in' (759). At the end, Isabel Archer's saga ends with her retracing her steps back to her cage. She is a martyr who no longer believes in her cause as she woefully laments by the end 'I never was what I should be' (769). Her submission to her situation illustrates her subjective self as Willig (117) argues subjectivity is formed from the conditions and discursive objects located in the texts of our novels. Discourses construct social as well as psychological realities and discursive positioning plays a key role in this

process (117). Subjectivity is the state of mind through which, as maintained by Davies and Harré, the world outside and the is external reality is judged 'through the particular images, metaphors, storylines, and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned'(35). Similarly, Foucault's ideas on the concepts of discourse, power/knowledge and subsequent formation of subjectivity provide insights into the influence of the discourses on the characters, their ideological orientation, and the scope for their subjective positions and possibility of action given their historical episteme. For him gender is socially constructed label that is sustained through the force of discourse (*The History of Sexuality* 117). Subjectivity is, therefore, validated through a set of relegations imposed from the internalized discourses that exercise their influence into forming gender categories and give validity to perceptions so ingrained in the subjective consciousness (*Ibid* 152).

Therefore, *The Portrait of a Lady* emerges a masterly study of the complex ways in which the protagonist, comes to terms with her subjectivity in the face invisible forces of culture 'inheritance, and circumstance (Graham 59). According to Andrew Taylor, James brings out Isabel's 'fundamental ontological insecurity' through 'peeling away the protective layers of Isabel's powerful self-confidence' (136). Furthermore, critic Hadley contends the Isabel's 'submission to the form of marriage and commitment despite her oft touted cherished personal liberty draws attention to entrenched socio-cultural structures that supersede individual volition (24). The ending of the novel is again illustrative of James' idea of institutional marriage. The choices that we make determine the scope of subjective action. Although she publicly paraded her love for liberty, circumstances get the better of her and she transformed into 'the custodian of domestic organization' (Niemtzow 380– 381). James' *The Portrait of a Lay* is, in effect, a portrait of nineteenth century discursive practices on marriage and gender. It a treatise of a woman's ambition to experience her calling in the world but ends up as an inveterate conformist of the patriarchal project and treads softly as not to deviate from the established discourses on the ideals of marriage and gender expectations.

CHAPTER 3

THE ODD WOMEN BY GEORGE GISSING

The second novel under analysis, *The Odd Women,* was written by George Gissing (1857-1903). As an author, Gissing stands apart from his literary peers of Nineteenth century for his bold realism in his novels that captured the sociocultural landscape of his time. He wrote largely about the plight of the lower classes of England. He was a prolific writer and, in a career spanning more than two decades (1880 to 1903), he authored twenty three novels. His notable works, besides the novel chosen for this dissertation, *The Odd Women* (1893), included *The Nether World* (1889), *New Grub Street* (1893) *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903).

In his literary style, Gissing bears a close resemblance to French realist fiction championed by Emile Zola, although unacknowledged by Gissing himself. His work was tinged with the facets of naturalism, although never acquiesced by the author himself ("George Gissing *Encyclopedia Britannica*"). Gissing's life was far from ideal and he personally lived through taxing early circumstances. It was a life filled with the relentless drudgery of writing for his sheer survival and guarding off poverty. His novel, *New Grub Street,* furnishes a glimpse into what the writer himself faced in his real life. His private life fared no better and he married twice, both wives, Nell Harrison, and Edith Underwood, became alcoholics and did not add to the private bless of the author. The only exception to this unpalatable side of his life was his finding happiness with Gabrielle Fleury, a Frenchwoman who lived with Gissing during his last years. Gissing was an accomplished essayist and his essay on Charles Dickens bore testimony to his skills in literary criticism. According to John Sloan, George Gissing had manifested his discontent with 'Victorian ideals of progress and social reform' from his very first novel *Workers in the Dawn* (15). In his literary style there was an explicit subversion of established structures of the Victorian novel and Sloan attributes it to a sense of intransigence resulting from his inner aspirations and the external reality of the world (17). This enabled him to record all aspects of life complete with their crude mundane realities.

Judy Stove in his *Remembering George Gissing,* quotes George Orwell as saying 'merely on the strength of *New Grub Streat, Demos,* and *The Odd Women* I am ready to

maintain that England has produced very few better novelists (128). Gissing mainly wrote serious works, he furnished them with ample comic vignettes. He had an eye for meticulous observation of life and recorded mundane details in his works. The lower middle classes of London constituted the bulk of his subject matter for his novels and gave him an opportunity to weave his insights into his works with unflinching realism.

3.1. George Gissing's *The Odd Women* in Context

George Gissing's *The Odd Women* is a detailed analysis of the social issues faced by women through a perceptive study of feminine psychology. The title of the novel is borrowed from a census conducted in the 1860s, that showed that adult population of Victorian England had a surplus unmarried women without marriageable partners making them the 'odd women'. This marked a moment for the feminists to break free of the view of regarding women as only wives and mothers and asked for alternatives avenues. They stressed the need to reject antiquated views of seeing women as mere candidates for marriage and signaled a moment to protest for revision in the social policies that had been ostensibly patriarchal erstwhile.

Elaine Showalter considers Gissing's *The Odd Women* as an 'an antidote to the sentimental fiction that celebrates romantic love' and that for Gissing the 1980s marked a period of sexual anarchy and the feminist movements mounted a challenge to deeply entrenched ideologies on gender norms (8). It is reflective of a decade where the question of marriage and finding a suitable husband engaged most of the writers. They engaged question of free unions, divorce in organized marriage and issues of gender inequality in general. Edith Abbott contends that Harriet Martineau was one of the earliest figures to describe in concrete terms in 1836 that women had to be independent, and girls needed to get education to broaden the scope occupations for them (616). The plight of untrained women from middle class backgrounds was allayed by women-led organizations that sought to offer new fields of occupation in lieu of occupational roles available to women i.e. teaching and working as governesses. Gissing seems to have in mind such societies dedicated to the betterment of young women for alternative occupations that served as a model for Mary Barfoot's employment center on Great Portland Street that teaches young women clerical skills (Showalter 11).

Gissing's *The Odd Women* is an exploration of Victorian discourses on gender roles and the institution of marriage in the late 19th century. It is undertaken through foregrounding of the intellectual quest of women from disparate socio-economic as well as class alliances of the period. It is set in London, the hub of cultural and political activity of the time. The brightest among the Madden sisters, also the youngest, Monica Madden tries to escape the established conventions by immersing herself in a world of fiction. Monica's forced by the hard economic situation she find herself and of her siblings. To escape economic dependence, she makes the fatal error of marrying Edmund Widdowson, who is drastically opposed to her. Much older in age and radically traditionalist in views, Edmund Widdowson who never understood Monica and her progressive views. It was as if 'reason and tradition contended in him, to his ceaseless torment (Gissing 220). Elizabeth Shand remarks that Monica's engagement with texts through her reading of the novels may have contributed to her emotional and psychological growth leading to her heated scenes of self-assertions with her husband, Edmund Widdowson (61). Widdowson invokes religious discourse to dominate Monica as he genuinely believed that religion as 'a precious and powerful instrument for directing the female conscience' (Gissing 173). He is naturally a staunch proponent of the Ruskinian ideal 'Woman's sphere is the home, Monica' as he is convinced that Ruskin's 'every word….about women is good and precious' (171). Monica asserts herself in the face of stringent strictures imposed by rigid Victorian on gender and their role in enforcing gender subjectivity. Gissing's work stands out as a testimony of Victorian episteme on gender issues and thus aids in explicating the role of discourses in introducing changes in the prevailing gender dynamics.

The book opens with the portrayal of the Madden family living in Clevedon, England. Upon the death of the family Patriarch, Mr. Madden, having left his six daughters a total sum of 600 pounds, the family falls on hard times and financial insecurity. The elder sisters Alice and Virginia move to London living on paltry means with just enough to keep them alive. They get to renew their relations with their childhood acquaintance, Ms. Rhoda Nunn, who along with Mary Barfoot, are engaged in teaching (through their school on Great Portland Street) secretarial skills i.e., type writing etc. to the lot of the odd women failing to make the cut for marriage. They are, thus, the the *odd women* of the title. In London, the youngest of the Madden sisters, Monica Madden, is depicted making ends

meet in a drapery store, a job she hates. She meets Edmund Widdowson, a middle-aged man, who marries Monica after a period of relentless pursuit. Monica eventually agrees to his request for marriage in order to seek financial security for herself and her sisters. However, Edmund soon begins to suffocate Monica with his obsessive jealousy and entrenched notions of a married life with the discourse of patriarchal Victorian England. While on the other end, Rhoda Nunn's avowed dispersion for marriage in favor of individual liberty and equality of rights is put to test by Everard Barfoot. The latter courts her so as to see if Rhoda can stand the test of what she truly believes in and ends up cultivating genuine feelings for her in the course of the courtship. Rhoda, to Mr. Barfoot's surprise assents to his marriage proposal but with the stipulation a traditional wedding. Albeit, owning to a misunderstanding, due to Monica's supposed affair with Everard Barfoot, Rhoda and Barfoot do not marry as Rhoda's feelings change in the meanwhile. This episode challenges Rhoda's position in favor of her stated solidarity with the *odd women* and her intellectual freedom coupled with her stated anti-marriage stance. Barfoot eventually decides to marry Agnes Brissenden who has a conventional education. As he muses, Agnes Brissenden had 'struck him as a very calm and sensible girl' who viewed marriage as a permanent friendship, which must not be endangered by feminine follies (Gissing 159). Monica's decision to leave her husband is an act of rebellion against the established norms of the age. She dies following complications of childbirth and Gissing ends the novel as he portrays Rhoda Nunn, overwhelmed with emotions as she holds Monica's child in the care of Virginia, utters 'Poor little child!' (371) amidst her tears, underscoring what she envisions for the child.

As the above discussion of the plot shows, *The Odd Women* (1893) tackles the question of marriage more broadly than the other novels chosen for this study as it refers to the 'half of million' women in the 19th century England who, as per numerical date were, in excess for potential male suitors, thus left out as the surplus, the odd ones. It is an unflinching look at a socially sanctioned bond of marriage that is sustained by inbred moral authority on the strength of gender discourses. The novel navigates through the complex socio-economic issues peculiar to Victorian women in the later nineteenth century. Gissing engages the women question in his treatise through recounting the lives of the Madden sisters who fall upon hard times following the death of their father Elkanah

Madden along with discussion of the New Women through the characters of Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot. In short, the book engages the gender discourses of the period through the plight of the Madden sisters on the brink of financial ruin and the emerging phenomenon of the New Women in the late Victorian England who challenged established gender values and sought alternatives to marriage for women who could not get married.

Gissing's portrayal of the militant feminist Rhoda Nunn in*The Odd Women* bears a close resemblance to James' Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of* Lady, as both put a high price on their individual liberty. They start out as faithfully committed to their individual aspirations and would like to experience their world on their own terms. As observed in the case Isabel Archer, Gissing's Rhoda Nunn is also deeply conflicted when tested on her principles on marriage. While Isabel sacrifices her personal ambitions and goes back to barren marriage with Gilbert Osmond, Gissing's Rhoda Nunn falters when confronted with the crude realities of the period. At first, readers see her as a champion of the rights of women who wants them to be financially in control so that they can survive on their own without being stuck in chokehold of an unhappy union. She is, however. not immune to the force of social conventions as she expresses her preference for a legalized marriage as opposed to a free union offered by Everard Barfoot.

3.2. Marriage and Gender in Gissing's *The Odd Women*

It becomes evident from the title of the novel, *The Odd Women*, that Gissing is set to launching a debate on the institution of marriage, gender, and the constitutive role of discourses in their epistemic environments. The role of discourses is borne out by the fact that Gissing names the chapter where Monica agrees to marry Edmund Widdowson as '*At the Nature's Bidding*' (120). The husband, Edmund Widdowson, is schooled in the Ruskinian tradition[2] that 'an educated woman had better become a domestic servant than try to imitate the life of a man' (171). He is wary of Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn's influence on his wife and calls them 'unwomanly' as 'They want to make women unwomanly, to make them unfit for the only duties women ought to perform' (183). These instances bear out Widdowson's inner conflict and agitations towards the influence of the

[2] Referring to John Ruskin's view of women from his lecture 'Of Queens' Gardens' (1865), championing the conventional view of women as ideal housewives with 'queenly power' and modesty of nature.

changing discursive landscape offered by Miss Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn. As mentioned above, she is vehemently opposed to the types of whole class of 'feeble, purposeless, hopeless woman living only to deteriorate' having been brought up to be married (Gissing 322). Rhoda Nunn stands for their independence in terms of making life choices for themselves instead of waiting helplessly for the prospects of potential suit from a husband.

The marriage theme of the book is rooted in its historical context. In Victorian England, marriage as an enabling agent of patriarchal agenda, had continued to fuel debates. Writing as late as in 1949, Simone De Beauvoir laments that 'a girl…can only vegetate as a parasite in her father's home or accept some lowly position in a stranger's home. She is forced to look for a husband whose situation is superior to her own, a husband she hopes will 'get ahead' faster and further than she could. (163). According to Patricia Ingham, Gissing, through his commentary on issues of sexuality, gender, and class, sets out to invite readers to challenge and contest the notion that 'marriage as supposedly the object of every woman's life' and raises questions on the mode of education for women and leads to a scrutiny of nature and ability of women' (XIII).

Furthermore, staying on the theme of the malleability of common values, Elaine Showalter notes in her introduction to *The Odd Women* that:

> Femininity is a construct; growing up female means learning to play a role. Women can make other women "unwomanly"; men can force womanliness upon them, by controlling their mobility, education, and economic dependency—a power function the Victorians called "guidance," as they called the strategies of women's powerlessness "influence" (16).

To Showalter, there are 'unmistakable signs in the world of *The Odd Women* that men are indeed uncertain and afraid, relinquishing some of their power to the more confident women who hold the hope for the future' (15). It is as if there appears to be a force for stifling of ambition and loss of individual liberty for both sexes involved. We do notice that Everard Barfoot credits miserable marriages to a lack of proper education for women which brings about an intellectual disparity that is certain to wreck the relationship. His circle of acquaintances suffer terrible unions. His brother Tom Barfoot's creative genius is shattered as a result of his doomed marriage and pays for it with his life (89). Besides the unlucky Tom Barfoot, there are others with similar unenviable fates as Patricia Ingham notes that 'Mrs. Orchard who so torments her husband by her stupidity

and triviality that he can only avoid suicide by abandoning her and their children; and Mrs. Poppleton whose dullness and dimwittedness drive her husband into a lunatic asylum'(XX). This underscores the misery of married life where marriage to the wrong person results in real damage to one another.

Everard Barfoot's concerns about intellectual inequality in matrimonial unions and its negative effect are shared by his feminist cousin Mary Barfoot. She observes to her friend Rhoda 'when one thinks how often a woman is a clog upon a man's ambition, no wonder they regard us as they do' (97). The only apparent exception to this invective on marriage seems to Barfoot's professor friend Mr. Micklethwaite. However, Barfoot is not won over by his arguments and regards Micklethwait's views as outdated and as representative of the Ruskinian notion of an ideal wife. He tells Micklethwaite:

> I admire your old-fashioned sentiment, Micklethwaite. It sits well on you, and you're a fine fellow. But I have much more sympathy with the new idea that women should think of marriage only as men do;—I mean, not to grow up in the thought that they must marry or be blighted creatures. My own views are rather extreme, perhaps; strictly, I don't believe in marriage at all (106).

This is further corroborated when Barfoot visits Micklethwaite after his marriage and is greeted with the stereotypical idyllic domestic bless that is similar to a Ruskinian obedient angel in the house analogy. The most ardent supporter of odd women, Rhoda Nunn, continues to stand up for them by challenging the dominant Victorian view. She disrupts the trajectory of this discourse by contesting the traditional romantic view of women. She tells Monica of her view of the odd women without marriageable partners:

> I look upon them as a great reserve. When one woman vanishes in matrimony, the reserve offers a substitute for the world's work. True, they are not all trained yet—far from it. I want to help in that—to train the reserve' (44).

Moreover, the bold statements of Gissing's Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot may be viewed in the backdrop of the contemporary gender discourses. Victorian feminist Mona Caird argues in *The End of Patriarchal System* that marriage as 'a mere moldering branch of the patriarchal tree—must alter its nature and its form' women's subjectivity and independence is constrained by marriage (54). She argues in the *Morality of Marriage* if women were to attain liberty like men 'all the relations of life, marriage, as we now understand it, would cease to exist : its groundwork would be undermined' (167).

In a historical sense, the idea of a single unmarried women was unique at the time and weight of dominant gender discourses was against it. Spinsters were looked downed upon in the Victorian England and were often the target of ridicule in paintings. The brutally marginalized half a million of women without marriageable partners occupied a center stage in gender debates. Showalter remarks that the tragic lot of odd women was a stark reminder that the discursive forces underpinning the patriarchal goliath could not separate women from the institution of marriage. This matrimonial bond were to be her only safe haven (13). The discourses of marriage and gender subjectivity had proponents for the prevalent patriarchal tradition in terms of gender characteristics to the extent that novelist Eliza Lynn Linton's widely read essays of the 1880s on "womanliness" outdid Ruskin in defining the 'womanly woman' as quiet, unselfish, modest, submissive, unambitious, and passionless (Showalter 13).

Gissing's *The Odd Women* questions the discursive nature of women and challenges the essence of what constitutes as nature. The invoking of nature was routinely taken up by the Victorians to support traditional gender divisions and perpetuate the imbalance of power relations between the sexes. This is represented by Gissing in the very first chapter of the novel where Mr. Madden, as the family patriarch, considers it in sync with the 'natural laws' that dealing with money matters and harsh realities of life was beyond women and it is a men's domain (5). Instead, he is of the view that women are meant to choose between the alternatives of entering into matrimony or stay with parents at home. The disastrous consequences that flow from the following of a Ruskinian ideal of women are graphically captured by Gissing when he describes the Madden family, its patriarch, Mr. Elkanah Madden and how the harsh, impoverished, and meaningless existence of his daughters who effectively turned into 'sheep' upon the demise of the 'shepherd' as illustrated in the opening chapter of novel, *The Fold, and the Shepherd* (06).

As already noted in the introduction to this thesis, John Ruskin in his 1864 essay '*On Queens*' *Gardens'* had argued that the natural sphere of women was domestic in her staying at home while the men braved the external world. To him men are 'active, progressive, defensive'. They were 'the creator, the discoverer, the defender' while women are 'for sweet ordering, arrangement' (Showalter 13). Mary in her 'Woman as Invaders speech' wants to do away with the bifurcation of these gender spheres and to do

so she wants woman to ‘become militant, defiant. She must push her claims to the extremity’ (Gissing 153). Thus, Gissing launches an investigation of marriage and woman's role in society. According to John Sloan, Gissing’s strong female characters are ‘notable examples of Gissing's ability to dramatize the interplay of social forces and individual psychology' (Sloan 119). According to Pierre Coustillas, Gissing’s *The Odd Women* is filled with ‘the force of genuine realism’ and that the plot is devoid of mandate conventionalities or didacticism and opens threads debates on gender discourse for generations to come (Coustillas 336). Gissing’s work, thus, navigates attempts of people reconciling their lives to a value-laden system that is dependent on a discoursive environment that is constantly shifting its epistemic boundaries.

According to Diedre David, Gissing, through Monica’s marriage to Widdowson has shown that there was a lack of alternative recourses for women and in a sheer struggle for existence ‘the only way out’ for them was to opt for marriage so as to gain a measure of ‘suffocating respectability’ (127). Moreover, Alam and Ramli maintain that Gissing has managed to do justice to the ‘Women Question’ in *The Odd Woman* by drawing attention to the social changes that offer alternatives to women without the traditional legalized ties of marriage (119). The novel, thus, holds a mirror to the tragic fate of remaining single without recourse to other choices. A way out, even to this day, must be aimed at derailing the constitutive elements of discourses that perpetuate this fate for women. The novel argues a conventional marriage does not have to be the answer, and targeted social reforms need to focus on offering better alternatives.

3.3. Discourses and Discursive Constructions of Marriage and Gender Subjectivity in *The Odd Women*

Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893) is an engrossing psychological analysis of gender roles and a bold scrutiny of the institution of marriage as an ideology of gender subjectivity within the episteme of Victorian discourses. Gissing partakes in the woman question with the aid of convincing female characters that invite our scrutiny of gender expectations in the fin de siècle discursive practices. The book takes a more direct approach towards its engagement of the discursive object of marriage and the issues of gender subjectivity in Victorian England by drawing an exhaustive outline of the problems

of single women and the obstacles to their gender independence. It is a broad treatise that examines gender roles within institutionalized marriage along with gender specific themes that explicate Victorian gender ideology. It is a proto-feminist work that upends established gender norms and feminine subjectivity within the context of ingrained ideology of the period. The novel challenges discursive practices within the episteme and has been credited as one of the earliest works in fiction that unites differing perspectives on gender dynamics deep-set in the Victorian worldview. Wendy Wesser notes, the novel 'is one of the best portrayals of the women's movement, old or new' (211). More broadly, Gissing foregrounds gender role expectations of the period where only logical role for young women was to seek out marriage and settle down as housewives while men braved the outside world. There is not much Victorian women could do with their lives at the time either. They had limited opportunities for employment or being independent from control of male hegemony. The few roles available to them ranged from working as governesses in rich families, being a schoolteacher or working as a companion to other ladies high in the social hierarchy.

Furthermore, as Karen Chase notes 'the decades between 1890 and 1910 represent the age of clerk … beginning of women's integration into the urban white-collar work force' and in the meanwhile the figures for unmarried female clerks rose dramatically to 'four or five hundred-fold' (233). While the Remington typewriter had made its appearance 1870s, it spawned a distinct class of women typewriters and Gissing's feminist character Rhoda Nunn uses it for 'shorthand, book-keeping and commercial correspondence' (Gissing 27). In the novel, we see Everard Barfoot defining Rhoda's work with ill-concealed scorn as 'copying with a type-machine and teaching others to do the same' (Gissing 205). In fact, for Rhoda and by extension for Gissing himself, it is more than a simple machine for typewriting. It served as a symbol for personal freedom and a way towards financial independence. She owns her work as an endeavor with larger socio-economic consequences for improving the lot of odd women of the Victorian era (Chase 234). Overall, the nineteenth century was an era of transition, and acquisition of education had taken the center stage in the discourses of gender subjectivity in Victorian debates. Mary Somerville had advised way back in 1869 that:

> Hitherto usefulness and duty to men have been thought to be the only objects worth caring for in relation to women; it would at least be generous to take the individual happiness of the sex into consideration in the scheme of education (Helsinger 397).

Amidst these debates, marriage in the world of *The Odd Women* comes off as failing institution that seeks to imprison women and dehumanizes them on the active authority of traditional patriarchal norms. The examination of discursive object of marriage accentuates disparate mechanics of discourse operations. It is to this end that Carla Willig notes that FDA considers the dynamic relationship between discourses and institutions and how they manifest themselves in 'the ways of organizing, regulating, and administering social life (113). According to Wesser, the plurality of views on the women's movement within the novel; from the marriage debates between Mary Barfoot with Rhoda Nunn, the grim reality of unskilled single women and the unsavory lot of those in married relation are illustrative of the lack of specificity within the discursive practices on gender roles in the nineteenth century (Wesser, 220). This lack of specificity is true to the Foucauldian nature of discourses as a free-floating mass of intricately complex systems of thoughts operating in a flux. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of discourses on gender ideology in the Victorian period, Dorothy Zaborszky regards *The Odd Women* as 'surprisingly complete and fair treatment of the major topics of Victorian feminism' and finds a remarkable confluence of the discourses of Victorian feminists and Gissing's work (492).

Gissing engages the discourse of marriage and gender surface in the very first chapter of the novel *The Fold and the Shepherd*. We learn through the narrator that the mother of the Madden sisters had 'fulfilled her function in this wonderful world' by having 'given birth to six daughters' (5). The late Mrs. Madden serves as thoughtful foil to Dr. Madden's conception of women. Gissing stresses that, although the deceased Mrs. Madden was 'admirable in the domesticities', she had been destined to live an unenviable life with 'secret anxieties' ruing her health and precipitating an early demise (5-6). This foreshadows ensuing action for the rest of the novel on the issues on gender roles and expectations in a matrimonial bond of a traditional marriage. The family patriarch, Dr Madden is Gissing's quintessential patriarchal figure who encapsulates Victorian discourse on gender roles. As a father of six daughters, Dr Madden is a typical patriarch who does not believe in the education or work for women (Zaborszky 492). For him 'the

home must be guarded against sordid cares to the last possible moment ... women, old or young, should never have to think about money (6). Dr. Madden typifies the patriarchal Victorian ideology believing that women need the guidance and protection of men, although he himself eventually proves to be an ineffectual patriarch who leaves his daughter illiterate and penniless upon his death (David 122).

3.4. Action Orientation

The most striking element within the world of *The Odd Women* can be traced to the shrinking of personal space for Monica Madden. In revisiting the woman characters in the novels, it can easily be identified that in the world of Gissing's *The Odd Women*, Monica is not a feminist like Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn, even though, as a Foucauldian docile character, she declares that much of the difference between the sexes is due to the unfair treatment of women (183). Widdowson, her husband, mounts his defense for the idea of manliness in the face of shifting discourses on the nature of entrenched gender brackets and the ensuing roles expected of them. Monica, distraught in the loveless marriage to Widdowson, shifts her ideals of masculinity towards Bevis and the latter's 'unmanliness' robs her of her naïve fantasies. She is disappointed in Bevis as:

> The unmanliness of his tone was so dreadful a disillusion. She had expected something so entirely different—swift, virile passion, eagerness even to anticipate her desire of flight, a strength, a courage to which she could abandon herself body and soul (256).

Monica is conflicted in her values of her upbringing and the dictates of established moral discourse of her episteme. To Lise Sanders, Monica is forced to seek a way out to her 'monotonous conditions of bourgeois domesticity' in her fantasies for 'transgressive sexual desires' (194). Monica's need for 'freedom of movement' made him 'anxious, suspicious, irritable' (Gissing 172). Upon her marriage with Edmund Widdowson, her movement are contained, and she feels stifled in the confines of marriage. This forces Monica to break free her conventional mold of discourse on her state and seek 'comparison with women's labor outside the home' (Sanders 208).

Although Monica's decision in marrying Widdowson was motivated by economic reasons, this plays a crucial role in curtailing her range of action and personal space throughout the novel. She pays dearly for marrying Mr. Widdowson. In a similar vein,

Wesser grounds Monica's decision to marry an ill-suited and much older man on her desire to escape the grinding poverty of her two elder sisters and the drudgery at the Draper's shop (218). Despite her youth and good looks, she is stuck with a despot in a dead-end relationship. The narrator notes that Mr. Widdowson 'took for granted that it was his to direct, hers to be guided' (171). Mr. Widdowson is extremely insecure about Monica and keeps her under surveillance. He keeps her imprisoned within the confines of their home as a naturally corollary of his belief in patriarchal notions on women's role and their nature He muses to himself if Monica tried to escape 'I should feel capable of killing her' (265). Deirdre David notes, Mr. Widdowson is 'chained to an ideology of female inferiority, he finds it is beyond his power to trust any woman and, therefore, subjects Monica and himself to an exhausting round of fretful disapprobation, moral sermonizing, and lachrymose self-abnegation' (124). The narrator underscores the idea that Widdowson could never put his confidence in women because 'he regarded them as born to perpetual pupilage … incapable of attaining maturity, remained throughout their life imperfect beings … misled by childish misconceptions' (219).

The dominant discourses of the period on gender subjectivity hold the key to Mr. Widdowson's source of gender ideology. His speech is undercut by a firm belief in Ruskinian philosophy of women's natural domain at home. His belief systems can be traced to Blackstone's *Commentaries* (1765) that declared 'by marriage the husband and wife are one person in law: that is the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage or at least incorporated into that of the husband' (368). Accordingly, Widdowson tells Monica 'the natural law that points out a woman's place . . . commands her to follow her husband's guidance' (185). Widdowson sincerely believes he must rule over Monica for her 'own good' (250). On the other hand, Monica objects to Widdowson's claim that men and women 'are made for entirely different duties' and she declares that she is not his servant, doomed to do good on her duty (187). Monica a reminds him of her rights as a human being with distinct aspirations and ideals of life:

> I should like to make more friends, and to see them often. I want to hear people talk, and know what is going on round about me. And to read a different kind of books; books that would really amuse me, and give me something I could think about with pleasure. Life will be a burden to me before long, if I don't have more freedom.' (183)

In denying Monica personal space, Mr. Widdowson is, therefore, an archetype of a male character who has imbibed the reigning discourses of marriages and genuinely considers Monica to be in the wrong for not abiding by his rules of ideal female conduct. Widdowson admires Ruskin and is convinced that men and women are essentially different with distinct roles to play in the society. For him, if women attempt to break free from this 'natural' dichotomy of sexes and impinge on male domains, they would be forced to live unnatural lives devoid of any substance (171). As Monica struggles with marriage and lives apart from her husband, Rhoda encourages her to be a role model and overcome her domestic troubles of loveless marriage with Mr. Widdowson. Only then can Monica rise above her personal problems and, as Rhoda Nunn says, 'will prove by your life that we can be responsible human beings (350). Rhoda Nunn's plea is reminiscent of what Frances Power Cobbe had called for in *The Duties of Women (1881)* that women had to be treated as 'responsible human beings' and not as intellectually inferior to men (152).

3.5. Positioning

As to the logical susceptibility of the characters to a particular course of action given their peculiar circumstances, the novel demonstrates it through the dilemmas faced by Monica Madden and Rhoda Nunn. Gissing's *The Odd Women*, while engaging the discourses on marriage through the dysfunctional marriage of Monica Madden with Widdowson, also threads through prevailing arguments on gender subjectivity through the characters of Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot. Rhoda is Gissing's version of a militant feminist. She has attained social respectability through persistence of effort and is now dedicated towards the provision of skills to the half a million odd women so that they can be self-reliant and do not have to wait for a potential husband. Rhoda takes an extreme view towards marriage and tells Everard that she would rather like that 'girls taught that marriage is a thing to be avoided rather than hoped for. I would teach them that for the majority of women marriage means disgrace' (113). Everard Barfoot wants to test Rhoda's strength of her ideal of making women independent and doing away with the institution of marriage (Chase 231). Gissing describes Everard as a young man with sound economic means and convinced in the precept of 'a ceaseless exercise of all one's faculties of pleasure' (94). Gissing uses Everard to showcase the mindset of typical Victorian men

on marriage and the role of women within that institution. Although Everard is convinced that he is in love with Rhoda, the temper within him demanded that he would not stop short of total submission on Rhoda's part:

> He could be satisfied with nothing short of unconditional surrender. Delighting in her independence of mind, he still desired to see her in complete subjugation to him, to inspire her with unreflecting passion. Tame consent to matrimony was an everyday experience (290).

Everard's final offer of marriage to Rhoda and the latter's insistence on a legalized marriage is an insightful instance of tradition trumping principle in the novel as the force of custom. Deeply entrenched social mores emanating from value laden institution of marriage are sharply contrasted when Rhoda asks for regular legal marriage instead of free union suggested by Everard Barfoot. As the latter slips a ring onto her finger, Rhoda cries 'Take it back. Custom is too strong for us. We should only play at defying it' (295). This brings into context what Foucault had cited as subjective range of action where positioning for resistance is directly proportionate to the degree of subjective absorption of gender discourses championed by regulatory authority, and their subconscious internalization of dominant sociocultural norms (*History of Sexuality* 141). Marriage as an enabling institution of regulatory authority, relays to the individual subliminal power dynamics that force subjects to consider the current situation as reality and function in complete obeisance to it. Even a militant feminist like Rhoda Nunn balks at the idea of defying social norms when being tested on her principles by Everard Barfoot. Similarly, Monica Madden, motivated by economic reasons, makes a critical error of judgment in marrying a man who suffocates her to her death with his gender ideology, and with his expectations of the ideal role of a wife in a married relationship.

In short, subjective positioning is dictated by the values of the nineteenth century episteme of Gissing's work and thus, there are hardly any happy marriages in *The Odd Women*. The only exception to this is the marriage of Mr. Micklethwaite with Fanny after an engagement of seventeen years. This is a subtle painting of a marriage founded on patriarchal tradition. Through Mr. Micklethwaite and Fanny, Gissing portrays a marriage based on Ruskinian ideals for a passive, docile wife as the angel in the house and laces it with hardy implicit scorn on a failing institution. For Micklethwaite, 'that little place … is one of the sacred spots of the earth … I feel that a mysterious light ought to shine about

it. It oughtn't to look just like a common house (197). This is in line with Victorian ideal of a happy marriage as Eliza Lynn Linton, with her hallmark antifeminist slant, had called the 'the mission of life' for married women complete with 'the sweetness of home life, love of the husband and the children, care to keep society pure and the moral tone of men wholesome and elevated . . .this is woman's work, this is woman's place (32). Gissing's depiction of their married house is infused with irony and immediately strikes the reader as a display of a jarring anachronism. He presents it as perfect vessel for an archetypical patriarchal construct complete with its trimmings of an ideal life found in the dominant discourses. This is evidenced by the fact that Micklethwait's friend Everard Barfoot, on his first visit after the former's marriage, is repulsed by the hallowed serenity of household. He muses that it would be no life for him. To him, 'marriage must not mean repose, inevitably tending to drowsiness; but the mutual incitement of vigorous minds (197).

3.6. Practice

Gissing's Monica Madden despite her young age and relative inexperience possesses a native independence of thought that is kept under check and only finds expression after she gets trapped in the loveless marriage with Widdowson. This is despite her submissive demeanor coupled with abject poverty that robs her of a forceful personality like that of Rhoda Nunn. Monica, through her facile conformity with a Foucauldian docile character, who is fully controlled by the force of biopower, nonetheless asserts herself towards the end and refuses to live in willful agony with a husband who is genuinely perplexed by her discontent. Given that the liberating factor within Foucauldian conception of dominant cultural discourses, which regulate all aspects of human life, lies in the idea of exposure to new subjective experiences, Monica Madden does mount a final challenge to the received cultural norms and asserts her individuality albeit with disastrous personal consequences. In a Foucauldian sense, Monica's standing up for herself is a challenge to self-evident systems of thought and forms of subjective resistance that affect how the power/knowledge duality is structured (*History of Sexuality* 42-43). Instances of such resistance to established systems of thought, even at a microcosmic level, can change the future trajectory of those gender discourses.

While analyzing the Madden sisters, readers notice that they are depicted as battling one calamity another from the very onset of the novel. The father's death plunges the six daughters in grinding poverty. Three of them die and the of other three surviving Madden sisters, Alice and Virginia eke out a living by working as a governess and companion, respectively. Monica, the youngest of the Madden sisters works as a shop girl. For the Madden sisters, it is a life of extreme poverty, deprivation, and inexorable misery where every day is a struggle. Monica, the youngest of the Madden sisters, detests her job at the draper's. She does not want to join Rhoda Nunn's 'old maid factory' either as the latter appears to her as a worse bondage than she had to suffer at the Draper's (59).

Monica Madden, thematically the most important of the Madden sisters, in a bid to liberate herself from financial concerns, ironically falls to the most oppressive of prisons. Her decision to marry Widdowson further robs her of her individual aspirations. She finds herself in a figurative prison which is more oppressive than its real counterpart. In an illustrative instance of Mr. Widdowson's ideology of marriage, he is genuinely perplexed by Monica's lack of conformity to the traditions. His thinking is in line with Victorian discourses on gender subjectivity of his period. Widdowson would agrees with what Greg and Ruskin propagated and believes that 'an educated woman had better become a domestic servant than try to imitate the life of a man' (171). Widdowson is terrified of the educated circle Monica is in contact with. For him, Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn constitute bad influences on Monica and their 'unwomanly' disposition may rob Monica of femininity and turn her against him (171). He declares to Monica:

> Woman's sphere is the home, Monica. Unfortunately, girls are often obliged to go out and earn their living, but this is unnatural, a necessity which advanced civilization will altogether abolish. You shall read John Ruskin; every word he says about women is good and precious. If a woman can neither have a home of her own, nor find occupation in any one else's, she is deeply to be pitied; her life is bound to be unhappy (171).

Gissing's Rhoda Nunn, Mary Barfoot, and Monica Madden, although subdued by the power of regulating discourses, nevertheless echo a changing dynamic in an era of resistance to dominant notions on gender and discourses which validated that subjectivity. This challenge to the status quo was triggered as the discourses of women's subjectivity within patriarchal oppression had gained momentum in mid eighteenth century with Mary Wollstonecraft's candid treatise on women's persecution. Following in her footsteps,

Victorian feminists, carried the cause forward with demands for greater equality of women. Barbara Bodichon, writing in 1857, had called women not to take their oppressed lot for granted and remarked:

> Women may not take a man as a god; they must not hold their first duty to be towards any human being . . . we ardently desire that woman should not make love their profession.' (Bodichon 9).

Gissing's *The Odd Women* therefore presents an alternative discourse on gender relations as mediated by the deeply rooted patriarchal institution of marriage. Although, vignettes of subjective resistance and practice do not amount to seismic changes, they nonetheless expose the mechanics of how gender subjectivity and how it is conditioned by the discourses of the time. The novel, therefore, is a portrait of a late nineteenth century Victorian England painted through the lens of discourses on decaying value systems and offers insights into how the complexities of conceptual frameworks function.

3.7. Subjectivity

When we examine Gissing's protagonists from the vantage point of FDA, it is noted they are influenced by the discourses of disciplining institutions that affect how their subjective selves assert themselves or submit in complete surrender. From the passive Madden sisters to the moderate Mary Barfoot, fighting for the socioeconomic uplift of women, to the very militant feminist Rhoda Nunn, it is evident they are beset with an antagonistic discursive environment that is dictated by a patriarchal system of values. It exerts its authority on the women and controls them through its matrimonial institution. Foucault had noted in his *Discipline and Punish* that the power of regulatory authority permeates all aspects of discourses on gender subjectivity and ensures that they keep circling in the vicious cycle of subjugation and in total conformity with the enforced norms kept in place by the discipling authorities (170).

However, Gissing does incorporate voices of dissent within the novel. It is worth noting that Barbara Bodichon's emphasis on feminine self-reliance without defining themselves in relation to men is echoed by Mary Barfoot's *Women as Invaders* speech, which succinctly describes the core tenants of feminist movement of the Victorian period. She echoes Francis Power Cobbe's caution that until a 'woman recognises the full scope

of her moral rank and spiritual destiny, the problem of 'Woman's Mission' can not be solved (Cobbe 26). Mary calls for 'gender autonomy', her emphasis on self-worth and independence mirror the demands of woman activists. Gissing has drawn on the discursive economy of the Victorian episteme through Mary's charged speech for the self-reliance and independence of her gender. She believes the proper world of a woman is not the classic professions associated with women i.e., 'an excellent governess' or 'a perfect hospital nurse', instead it is a world where women exercise their free volition through 'honest effort' and native 'intelligence' (153). She declares:

> Our proper world is the world of intelligence, of honest effort, of moral strength … I don't care what results, if only women are made strong and selfreliant and nobly independent! … Enough for us to know that our natural growth has been stunted … we will free ourselves from the heritage of weakness and contempt! (152-153).

Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot's heated debates on the ultimate value of institutionalized marriage reflect different strands of gender discourses with the late Victorian period. The arguments proffered by Mary and Rhoda, along with their inherent dissents and contradictions on the feminine project reflect how discourses not only affect their subjective selves but also influence those very discourses in turn. Mary Barfoot is not against marriage in general but more of a champion of creating opportunities for women so that they can live off independently of it, if need be. She says to Rhoda that 'we wish to prevent girls from marrying just for the sake of being supported, and from degrading themselves … we can admit that the vast majority of women would lead a wasted life if they did not marry' (69). And that the 'the institution of marriage' is not to blame for what is human fate and that 'whether they marry or not, will suffer and commit endless follies'. Moreover, to Mary 'human nature' and 'effects of institutions need not be conflated' while Rhoda holds the opposite view and believes that 'the vast majority of women lead a vain and miserable life just because they do marry' (69). Deirdre David argues that in *The Odd Women* 'different sets of contradictions interlock, where the power of dominant beliefs is confronted, subverted, and very often affirmed both in Gissing's characters and in the implied author himself' (130). Given that the characters along with the author himself are products of epistemic discourses, discursive fissures and unconscious values affect their characters' development. For instance, Monica with her

ill-conceived love affair with the effeminate Bevis, Rhoda Nunn's inconsistency on her stance with Everard, Mary's views on the specificity of gender role and Widdowson's struggles with the dictates of reason and the influence of tradition point towards the fluidity of discursive practices.

As noted by Deirdre David, *The Odd Women* begins and ends with two symbolic events. The death of Dr Madden can be construed as the dying discourse of patriarchal ideology on gender and the birth of Monica's child can be viewed as emblematic of a new woman. The novel, through its complex treatment of dominant discourses of the period anticipates social change (117). *The Odd Women* brings together disparate discourses on the major tenants of nineteenth century feminine debates. It is a vast landscape of discursive practices that influence established patriarchal values, beliefs and traditions which are in turn equally influenced by them as witnessed through the characters of the novel. It also speaks to wide spectrum of issues of the period and lends credence to the claim by John Sloan that Gissing's work is a 'diffuse attack on Victorian ideals' (14). Given that Foucauldian discourse is predicated on the premise that hegemonic control over subjective conformity is never entirely absent in any episteme and even those opposing it are bound to use its tools, Gissing's portrait of the period offers a thorough engagement of those discourses. It has provided a closer examination of their building blocks within their epistemic environment. It has generated newer forms of resistance for subjective independence with implications for its eventual reflection in social policy. Moreover, as Nicola Gavey argues, FDA derives its influence in feminist research because it is ideally suited for analyzing construction of gender subjectivity, relations of power and social practice (460). Again, the thematic import of Gissing's work has been seen in terms of how epistemic discourses over time concretize as infallible truth claims. This examination of microcosmic structures is important as Judith Butler had argued in her book *Gender Trouble* that gender occurs when a series of acts on the part of the individual are performed with reiteration that overtime appear natural, and this process constitutes the naturalization of gender (11).

CHAPTER 4

JUDE THE OBSCURE BY THOMAS HARDY

Thomas Hardy (1829-1928) wrote his final novel, *Jude the Obscure,* in 1895. The work sparked a heated public outcry at the time of its publication over the author's bold treatment of sex, sustained criticism of the institution of marriage and the book's perceived anti-religious content. This prompted the author to quit writing works of fiction and he, henceforward, focused on his poetry. The novel remains an extensive exposé of Victorian gender ideology, intricately engaging with discourses on gender subjectivity and presents marriage as mainly a flawed institution of gender repression. Through the trials and tribulations of its main characters Jude and Sue Bridehead, the novel mounts a challenge on received notions over the institution of marriage and how its exploitive sexual mores, along with patriarchal control mechanisms, oppress women.

Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* has, nonetheless, been able to stand the test of time and is often credited as one of the most critical works of the fin de siècle literature of the late Victorian period. It is chronologically the latest novel with its thematic focus on gender subjectivity and marriage following James' *The Portrait of a Lady* and Gissing's *The Odd Women* as analyzed in the preceding chapters two and three, respectively. This work establishes multiple parallels with the previous two novels through its examination of reigning gender ideology that exerts control of its subjects by invoking the discourses championed by the matrimonial institutions and sustained with the aid of dominant narratives. The women characters of the novels, as observed through Henry James' protagonist Isabel Archer, Gissing's Monica Madden and Rhoda Nunn, Hardy's Sue Bridehead find it beyond their capacity to resist deeply entrenched gender ideology and are left with no recourse other than bowing out in submission.

Thomas Hardy, through his long literary career, wove into his works vignettes of hapless protagonists at odds with their circumstances and drew up striking portrayals of humans in relations to nature. His works capture the indifference of natural laws that are oblivious to human plight. Some of his important works of fiction include *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), *The Return of the Native* (1878), Far from the Madding Crowd

(1894), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *The Woodlanders* (1887) and the novel chosen for this dissertation, *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

With his novel *Jude the Obscure,* Hardy comes full circle on his views on the prevailing gender debate sparked by the New Woman movement in the Nineteenth century. According to Goetz, the novel presents marriage as a decaying institution that is in dire need of drastic reform and that it was incompatible with the modern times as a moldy relic of the past and is often considered one of the gloomiest works of the author (Goetz 189). It was the intensity of fierce negative reviews and personal condemnation of the author that forced Hardy to stop writing novels. Schweik notes that notwithstanding the vociferous criticism the book was subjected to at the time of its publication, the novel along with much of Hardy's literary oeuvre, has made a significant impact regarding the engagement of gender values and human sexuality at large, sealing his stature as an influential author of his generation (89). According to Ken Ireland, Hardy's book also conforms to the Bildungsroman tradition in its characters' gradual acquisition of emotional maturity and personal growth (189). However, having said that, in the case of Jude and Sue in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure,* the dominant epistemic discourses prove to be beyond their realm of resistance and, they succumb to the ideological pull of established gender ideology in the late Victorian period.

4.1. Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* in Context

Hardy's *Jude the Obscure,* despite its contentious reception at the time of its first publication, has been widely hailed as his most modern work of fiction in terms of the issues it tackles (Schweik 86). During its serialization, the novel had appeared under several working titles i.e., *The Simpletons* and *Hearts Insurgents.* As noted at the onset of this chapter, the novel was criticized in certain circles for its espousal of doctrines against institutionalized marriage, having been written in a period where the author was romantically involved with Florence Henniker (a writer of 'New Women' novels), who is believed to have supplied the inspiration for the character of Sue Bridehead in the novel (Sutherland 67). Although Hardy denied the presence of any autobiographical elements in *Jude the Obscure,* some critics maintain the author's rocky marriage may have provided much of the inspiration for the novel (Millgate 128). Moreover, the author himself admits

in the postscript to the novel that, 'there can be more in a book than the author consciously put there' (xlvi).

The novel opens with Hardy's protagonist, Jude Fawley, moving in with his aunt at the age of ten. The readers can immediately notice that Jude is brimming with personal ambition and is keen on moving ahead in the world through sheer personal application and hard work despite his unenviable socioeconomic situation. However, he is ruthlessly rebuffed in his efforts and gets trapped in loveless marriage with Arabella Donn. Although, deep down Jude realizes that he is 'drifting strangely', he cannot bring himself to resist Arabella's barely concealed admonition that 'there's nobody after me just now, though there med be in a week or two' (36). The marriage ends in mutual rancor and Arabella soon leaves Jude and departs on a journey towards Australia. Despite being married to Jude, Arabella marries someone in Australia. While on the other hand, the marriage and the subsequent separation, heralds Jude's downward spiral towards loss and rejection, foreshadowing the disastrous fallout he suffers towards the end of the novel. Equally important, or perhaps more cogent to the study at hand, Jude's pursuit of his cousin Sue Bridehead and their cohabitation out of wedlock provides Hardy a rich canvas to delineate his views on Victorian marriage and how it proves to be tragedy to those chained into it. In the preface to the novel, Hardy had remarked that 'that a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties—being then essentially and morally no marriage' (xlv). This theme of incompatible marriage in *Jude the Obscure* and the psychological torment that it incurs on the partners is succinctly captured by Sue Bridehead's marriage to the emotionally cold and much older Mr. Phillotson. Sue finds it unbearable to stay in the same house with Phillotson and one time jumps out of the window when the former enters her room at night (221). This draws a strong parallel to Gissing's marriage plot of Monica with the much older Mr. Widdowson as discussed in the previous chapter. In the case of Monica, the torture of daily existence with Widdowson who is immersed in Victorian ideology of marriage exhausts her both physically and emotionally, precipitating her early death.

As the *obscure* of the title suggests, Hardy's Jude presents a sorry portrait of loss and rejection of the male protagonist who is gradually propelled to a tragic end. There is a palpable sense of alienation that Jude finds impossible to shed. It starts from the time he

sets foot in his aunt Drusilla's place to the shock of rejection from Sue Bridehead at the end of the novel. Sue Bridehead subsumes much of the drama of the novel as she crusades against institutionalized marriage and gender ideology in Victorian England. According to Jane Thomas, Hardy's characterization of Sue Bridehead is his 'most pessimistic presentation of the limited powers of the self under the constraints of history and patriarchy' (17). Thus, it is reflective of women who continue to suffer in a discursively mediated environment that continues to oppress them. In the case of Sue's cousin, Jude Fawley, there is gradual withering away of desire and his ambitions for personal improvement result in bitter failure. Jude's subjectivity is altered by the throes of fate by external forces that remain outside his apparent domain (Burstein, 32). As a product of amorphous systems that define his subjectivity, Jude is, in Lacanian terms, therefore destined to suffer through the complexities of those forces, and his scope of action is significantly contained (Lacan 321). Moreover, John Hughes has suggested that the eponymous 'obscurity' of Hardy's protagonist is rooted in the sea of unrealized dreams that Jude is chasing as seen in the backdrop of the narrator's clairvoyant signaling of 'the times yet to come' (90).

As observed in the above discussion of the novel's plot, marriage stands out as the dominant thematic agenda for Hardy. Rosemarie Morgan contends that the theme of marriage as a failing institution had appeared in Hardy's earlier works and his heroine Bathsheba Everdene had likened institutionalized matrimony to a form of legalized prostitution (130). Therefore, marriage as a theme was not unchartered territory for Thomas Hardy. However, the very response and reception to *Jude* has been interpreted as factors that showcase the modernity of the novel. Its bold treatment of the topics of marriage and sex make it a 'almost twentieth-century' novel (Ireland 204). According to Robert Schweik, its characters are caught in an intellectual quagmire where old customs are gradually losing their footing while new tools are ineffective in making sense of the burgeoning socio-cultural landscape (87-88). This has the logical ramification of a discursive space where conventional beliefs fail to form a bulwark against the intellectual crisis which makes accepting traditional systems of thought particularly irrelevant in a fast-paced discursive environment. All this leads to uncertainty and aids in exposing the fissures in the traditional authoritarian control. Patricia Ingham contends that in Hardy's

novel fleshes out both the characters as 'victims of contemporary oppression: Jude through class, Sue through sex and the novel remains a 'powerful indictment of the sexual and class oppression' (Ingham XX). Tradition seems to triumph time and again in towering over individual aspiration. Sue, despite her initial rebellion 'opts' for 'irrationality' and goes back to legalistic marriage (XXI). The novel, therefore, amplifies discourses on gender roles and patriarchal oppression as upheld through the institution of marriage.

The mechanics of these discourses on gender and marriage must be viewed in the context of deeply entrenched sociocultural narratives. Jude's helplessness in the face the insurmountable circumstances, and Sue's emotional meltdown bordering on religious mania by the end of the book are illustrative of how reigning discourses overpower them. According to Willig, given that gender discourses are amorphous with multilayered systems of knowledge, they evade specific loci and rather function in weblike networks of meaning that influence subject positions (Willig 117). Therefore, they operate on characters deeper consciousness and impede their scope for action that is in contradiction to the dominant narratives of the time. They fall back upon a discursively mediated language which fails to provide them any recourse given that language as a subset of discursive practices, does not have a stable structure. Hardy's work navigates this discursive dynamic with elusiveness of the medium of language. In this regard, Janet Burstein is of the view that *Jude the Obscure* underscores 'the inappropriateness and the superficiality of conventional language' through its illustrative passages (506). This sets well with the Foucauldian view of discourse that sees it as operating in diverse layers of signification where the cumulative sum all of discourses are conducive to the reigning ideological structure and preclude alternatives against the epistemic discourses.

Jude the Obscure charts through the discursive environment of its period (from 1770 to mid-nineteenth century) where middle class family evolution stands out by its strict adherence of moral ascendency 'paternal control and sexual repression' (Stone 669). Jude is a thorough 'reflection of man in society and in the cosmos' (Rachman, 46). Jude's state of mind is exhibited in his private cogitations that provide a window into his subjective self. In a moment of self-introspection, he wonders whether 'the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress'… or simply 'women

are to blame' (209). The novel, as emblematic of Hardy's last major work of fiction writing, captures the true essence of his engagement with the discourses on gender and the pervading influence of institutions of authority. Hardy had proclaimed in the preface to *Jude the Obscure* that his work essays to capture 'a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the question of their consistency or their discordance, of their permanence or their transitoriness, being regarded as not of the first moment' (xliii). Therefore, the author's condensation of the above mentioned 'seemings' and 'personal impressions' on the institutionalized marriage offers an insightful disquisition into the epistemic discourses on gender and marriage in late Victorian England.

4.2. Marriage and Gender in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*

Marriage is a major theme in Thomas Hardy's Jude *the Obscure*. The text, at times, reads as a substantive missive of the author's grievances on the institution of marriage and how legalized marriage thwarts individual ambition by its deeply embedded discursive hierarchy of gender ideology. To Hardy, Victorian marriage, as it stood at the time, was deeply problematic and at odds with nature as evidenced by his views in the preface to the novel. He stood for a bond that could be undone as soon as it was drained of mutual love and nothing more than a voidable contract (xlv). The theme of marriage and its role in circumscribing individual ambition is at the heart of the novel. This theme, according to Anthony Kearney, afforded Hardy to pen a novel that essentially reads as a 'tragedy of unfulfilled aims' (155). In the very first chapter of *Jude the* Obscure, Jude's aunt Drusilla warns him against marrying. With 'Jude my child, don't you ever marry. Tisn't for the Fawleys to take that step any more' (8). As if in confirmation of this premonition, the novel threads through marriages that bring ruins to the partners. The book begins with Jude's calamitous wedding to Arabella that throws the latter off his trajectory of personal achievement in the academia. Jude and Sue's extramarital cohabitation turns them into social pariahs and their final remarriage to the original partners holds nothing for them except for forced unions devoid of mutual feeling.

The discourse on marriage and gender in *Jude the Obscure* may be viewed within the context of Victorian gender ideology and how marriage as an institution functioned. As adumbrated in the introduction of the thesis, divorce was relatively uncommon as it

did not emerge as legal recourse for women until the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. Prior to the passing of this act, divorce was a privilege for the influential people as it required special parliamentary procedure. With this act, the husband could sever his relationship with his wife contingent upon proving adultery and the bar was much higher for women who had to prove another failing i.e., desertion, bigamy besides adultery to obtain a divorce settlement. As Morgan (97) notes this was, therefore, not viable for of action for Sue. It, nevertheless, did change with the 1893 Married Women's Property Act that stipulated that woman could exercise control over their property before and even after they enter the bond of matrimony. It may be borne in mind that a typical Victorian woman was still deprived of a proper education and lived to be married off to a man who promised viable financial prospects. The marriage, however, most often reduced the wife to the status a of hired hand who depended entirely on her husband for her mere survival. The prevalent Victorian gender ideology was massively skewed against women and their subjugation was condoned based on how gender dynamics were construed at the time. This had prompted the leading thinker of the time, John Stuart Mill, who took issue with idea of a predetermined nature of women in his *The Subjection of Women* and termed it as 'an eminently artificial thing' (36) and warned against making it a basis for the subject of women and determining gender roles. The Victorian discourse had made allowance for the classification of the mere conventional as natural. There was a nascent but vocal movement slowly gaining momentum that called for reform in how gender dynamics function with women ending up at the receiving end. It was a call for breaking the mold of subjective control through the policing of gender narratives as exercised by institutionalized marriage.

Given the above background, Hardy's novel, according to Phillip Mallet, allows the author the use of his narrative voice to expose the institution of marriage as a giant monolith that was decaying from within and was in the need of immediate reform (212). The final treatise of the book, therefore, rests squarely with Hardy's views on institutionalized marriage as analyzed in the backdrop of the 19th century gender politics. It would not be far-fetched to venture that when Jude likens Victorian marriage in the absence of love to 'fanatic prostitution' (349), he is in fact encapsulating the author's stance on the subject. By extension, therefore, the state of being married was analogous

to bonded labor and permanent state of servitude sanctioned by law in vogue at the time. Sue's eventual submission to convention and passive capitulation to a person she abhors is analogous to Henry James' Isabel Archer's decision in *The Portrait of a Lady* to go back to a husband who hates her and sees her as nothing more than object to be looked it much like the paintings he collects. It is also like George Gissing's Monica Madden in *The Odd Women* who pays with her life for refusing to live with her husband, Mr. Widdowson. Sue Bridehead's surrender to conventions that the vehemently opposed prior to her marriage with Phillotson speaks volumes of dominant gender discourses and how they create protagonists who eventually resign to their circumstances. Their apparent 'choosing' to go through torture is emblematic of a discursively mediated subjectivity and neatly illustrates ingrained Victorian gender narratives and how they create willing victims with latent forces of social conventions. Hardy's Sue Bridehead transforms from a woman of independent views, who at first put ups a fight against patriarchal institutions of control, into a docile figure who loses out to the multifaced control mechanisms of discursive practices of authority.

It is worthwhile to note that Hardy's Sue Bridehead had been indoctrinated in a gendered ideology from early on in her life. Early in the novel, Drusilla Fawley gives the impression that Sue had been exposed to a gendered construction and she had an awareness of her gender orientation. As noted by her aunt Drusilla, Sue would often demurely skip away inside, and boys would implore her to come back outside and play with them and she 'could do things only boys do as a rule' (105). Drusilla hints at Sue's nonconventionality from her childhood and how appalled she was when Sue walked into 'the pond with her shoes and stockings off and her petticoats pulled above her knees, afore I could cry out for shame she said: 'Move on, aunty. This is no sight for modest eyes!' (105).

Similarly, the epistemic discourses exercise their influence on Jude and what he desires to be eventually (an ordained minister at Christminster). His sense of reality, as Morgan notes, has been formed by the religious discourses as evident in his endeavors of gleaning wisdom from the bible (Morgan 136). Despite his lack of resources and grinding poverty, Jude aspires to study at Christminster but, is unable to realize his dream as the university establishment looks down upon self-taught commoners like Jude. There is

sorrow and desolation in the backdrop of an aspiring boy who continues to pine throughout the novel until his miserable demise by the end of the novel. As observed earlier, Jude's character is accompanied by a sense of loss and dejection. He is trapped in an unhappy marriage with Arabella Donn and soon any sentiment of feeling is withered away between them precipitating a state of disappointment and acrimony in the newlywed couple. His subsequent pursuit and cohabitation with Sue out of wedlock aggravates their alienation from society that frowns upon them. The disowning of the couple by the society is Hardy's way of demonstrating the repercussions for flouting conventions on marriage and challenging dominant discourses. It is not a society that opens itself to those who despise social conventions. Sue and Jude's attempt at asserting their own individuality against socially constructed artificialities spells a calamity for them. The horrid end to their brief struggle in the face of convention drives home Hardy's idea of a society that punishes its delinquents. Phillip Mallet argues that the characters of Jude and Sue are representative of the discourses of a period and social conventions and systems of values 'permeate their language and their being' (217). Through *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy has been able to skillfully mold the narrative through the worldviews of its principal characters and the contrast of discursive perspectives enhances its ideological campaign within the discourses of late Nineteenth century Victorian England (Morgan 119). The novel brings out the inherent hypocrisy in Victorian mores and its ideological control on the discourses of institutionalized marriage and gender roles. Although Hardy himself agrees that a book can contain more than what the author may have 'consciously put' there, and the same can appeal to broader discourses not necessarily advocated by the author (Morgan 136). Nonetheless, Hardy's work provides insights into Victorian discourses on gender and the epistemic landscape of marriage in the period. The issues that the novel raises stay relevant till this day, and this makes Rosemarie Morgan argue that although feminists may have distanced themselves from viewing all discourses through a patriarchal lens, the latter has not been wholly abandoned with vocal advocates of viewing texts through gender dynamics (120). A Foucauldian lens, thus, situates texts as cultural products that contain the constituent elements of the dominant discourses of a period.

4.3. Discourses and Discursive Constructions of Gender Subjectivity and Marriage in *Jude the Obscure*

Jude the Obscure provides Hardy with a vessel to express his discontent with how gender dynamics operate within the world of the novel. Sue's early rebellious nature was in a way the author's acknowledgement of the contemporary period of transition where enlightened women were beginning to question gender values and challenge the existing systems of discourses on gender roles as demanded by institutionalized marriage. It is a fierce denunciation of extant social forms upheld by patriarchal values. The rigidity of the 'letter' is a key obstacle to growth because the 'letter killeth' as utilized as a subtitle of the novel. According to Goetz, *Jude the Obscure* is a long treatise dedicated to the exploration of marriage as a legalistic bond that underpins Hardy's criticism of the institution (197). This finality that institutionalized marriage entails is reflected in Sue Bridehead's consternation towards an oppressive system. Upon her betrothal to the much older Mr. Phillotson, Sue confronts the finality of legalized marriage. She notes the bride serves as a chattel as she is 'given away' at the altar like a household commodity. It is as if she were a 'a she-ass, or she-goat, or any other domestic animal' (163).

Sue's marriage with Mr. Phillotson illustrates the failings of the institution of marriage when devoid of feeling in partners but under oath to live together. Sue finds her marriage with Mr. Phillotson unbearable and declares that living in intimacy with a partner in the absence of feeling is akin to 'adultery', no matter where it stands in front of law of the land (214). Notwithstanding the fact that Sue Bridehead finds conventional marriage a diabolical state of torture akin to total helplessness (203). She is forced to abide by the set of sociocultural conventions that the discourse on gender demands. She laments 'I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies' (197). Goetz considers Sue's defenselessness under the forces of conventions as symbolic of widespread control mechanisms exercised by discourses (196). Sue's distrust of contractual marriage accounts for her absence of feeling for Phillotson. Her cynicism is amplified in her reservations on institutionalized marriage as she asks Jude 'Don't you dread the attitude that insensibly arises out of legal obligation? Don't you think it is destructive to a passion

whose essence is its gratuitousness?' (262). For Sue, the formality of oath and its ceremonious administration robs a matrimonial relation of passion and destroys desire with its obligatory injunctions for feeling (Goetz 196).

Marriage and gender discourse is further complicated with regard to the unusual marriage of Sue with Phillotson. The latter is baffled for Sue's lack of passion, and he is thrown into a genuine conundrum upon Sue's desire to abandon the marriage and her wish to go and live with Jude. Richard Phillotson invokes the injunctions of Victorian gender ideology much like Gissing's Edmund Widdowson in *The Odd Women.* Both Phillotson and Widdowson rely on entrenched epistemic ideology to subdue their wives when faced with resistance to their patriarchal authority. Hardy's Mr. Phillotson seek recourse to the discursively mediated conventions of marriage that define the duties and responsibilities of a wife in a matrimonial relation with her husband. He is at conflict with his reasons and what he is supposed to do as a husband. When Sue requests him to leave him and join Jude, Phillotson is bewildered and outraged at the same time as he notes to his longtime friend Mr. Gillingham:

> I know I can't logically, or religiously, defend my concession to such a wish of hers; or harmonize it with the doctrines I was brought up in. Only I know one thing: something within me tells me I am doing wrong in refusing her. I, like other men, profess to hold that if a husband gets such a so-called preposterous request from his wife, the only course that can possibly be regarded as right and proper and honourable in him is to refuse it, and put her virtuously under lock and key, and murder her lover perhaps (222).

Despite this apparent moral quandary, Phillotson chides Sue for withholding her affection towards him with 'you are committing a sin in not liking me' and 'you vowed to love me' (214). It does not end with a mere admonition, but Phillotson's friend Gillingham invokes Phillotson's 'right' of using violence to force her to submission and suggests that 'I think she ought to be smacked and brought to her senses—that's what I think!' (224). Nevertheless, for Sue, it is an instance of her rebellion against a tradition that belies logic to her. She openly asks 'why can't we agree to free each other? We made the compact, and surely we can cancel it' (214). Acknowledging Phillotson's awkward situation in her asking her to let her go, she pleads:

> I would not ask if I were not almost compelled by what I can't bear! No poor woman has ever wished more than I that Eve had not fallen, so that (as the primitive

> Christians believed) some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise (219).

While on the other side of the discursive spectrum, it can be argued that Sue Bridehead's choosing to live with Jude out of wedlock is her way of robbing institutionalized marriage of its relevance. Sue Bridehead's spirit of resistance to conventions is further amplified in her indifference to the public's perception of her living in a state of adultery, although she is averse to it in private, given that her relationship with Jude is only consummated after they obtain divorces from their previous marriages. This perceived idea of Sue's cohabitation with Jude prompts Phillotson to file for divorce. On the other hand, Sue's divorce from Phillotson coincides with Jude's divorce from Arabella. In both cases, the husband has sought divorce citing the infidelity of their wives. Although Sue's infidelity differs from Arabella's and is used as a means of getting out of marriage with Phillotson, Sue is conflicted about the propriety of their conduct with regard to the divorce application and says to Jude:

> If the truth about us had been known, the decree wouldn't have been pronounced. It is only, is it, because we have made no defence, and have led them into a false supposition? Therefore is my freedom lawful, however proper it may be?' (248).

Jude's argument in support of marriage being natural does nothing to bring ease to Sue. He attempts to assure her with, 'people go on marrying because they can't resist natural forces, although many of them may know perfectly well that they are possibly buying a month's pleasure with a life's discomfort' (241-250). Upon ditching the effort to formally register the marriage in the court of law, Jude and Sue let people around them believe that they are in fact legally married without having to fulfil the 'the sordid conditions of a business contract' (275). Sue adopts Jude's surname and goes by the name of Mrs. Fawley. Another instance of the novel's undermining marriage as an unnatural system of control comes to notice when Arabella marries a man in Austria although she is already married to Jude (Goetz 194). The novel shows that Victorian marriage, despite the force of dominant discourse on its side, has lost its moral high ground and is sidestepped at the altar of expedience.

Even though the entire novel rests on the marriage theme and how it was failing as an institution, it is only in the third and fourth chapters where it attacks legalized marriage more directly. Sue's marriage to Phillotson, with its attendant incongruity

provides much of the rationale that Hardy relies on to discredit Victorian marriage. Early in the novel, when Jude's and Arabella's marriage takes place, the narrator comments on the crude formality of marriage, noting that Jude and Arabella:

> Swore that at every other time of their lives till death took them, they would assuredly believe, feel, and desire precisely as they had believed, felt, and desired during the few preceding weeks. What was as remarkable as the undertaking itself was the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore (52).

Sue laments the finality marriage forces upon the contracting parties. To her, most women just accept their fates and submit and that when 'people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say!' (206). Her prescience is not lost on critics as Rosemarie Morgan notes in her *Woman and Sexuality* that Hardy's Sue is much ahead of her times in her rigorous attack on institutionalized marriage and its inherent ills. She takes issue with the matrimonial codes of conduct which are nothing more than historical anachronisms to her (70). She is unable to reconcile herself with the notion that a woman upon marriage becomes a man's property and that a government stamp is required for sexual relationships. Sue was advocating what Olive Schreiner has called a decade later 'a fellowship of comrades' and complete overhaul of institutionalized marriage (Morgan 71). Sue is convinced that it is nothing less than torture to submit to social conventions and women agree to the bonded relationship as it alters their social standing given that 'they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to confer, and the social advantages it gains them sometimes—a dignity and an advantage that I am quite willing to do without' (Gissing 250). This refusal to docile compliance results in their social ostracism, turning Jude and Sue into exiled pariahs, no matter where they go, as victims of an anachronistic tradition. Morgan notes that this notion of being 'licensed to be loved' was in the backdrop of the laws in effect in late Victorian England. (130).

Thus, Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* exposes the ugliest aspects of contractual marriages and how they run counter to what is supposed to be a natural expression of feeling. The author, despite his protestations to the contrary, had no love lost with how Victorian marriage functioned. The very plot structure of the novel involving a curse for the Fawleys to marry may be a deliberate tactic on the part of Hardy to deflect attention away from his own unenviable married life and as a vociferous attack on marriage as an

institution (Dellamora 465). While writing to Edward Clodd, Hardy maintains that modern marriage is akin to a state of 'survival' and that it was a 'custom of capture & purchase, propped up by a theological superstition' (Letters, V2.92). Millgate notes that although laws had from 1870s and onwards begun to provide relief to married women, old attitudes persisted, nonetheless (261). Besides, it must be borne in mind that divorce was not an easy affair at the time and wives had the added responsibility of proving before the court of law that the husband, besides adultery, had also engaged in incest, desertion, or bigamy. In *Jude the Obscure* the authority of the entrenched narratives of control, through the epistemic discourses, is ineluctable for both Jude and Sue. One is held back by his class and the other by her gender. They, nonetheless, reside in the crude reality of their ideological world and their subjectivities are determined by it through preconceived parameters. According to Phillip Mallet, this reveals that all discursively constructed values systems exist without an unadulterated 'natural' state that is unaffected by dominant gender discourses (218). Moreover, Mallet observes that in the overall scheme of the novel, Hardy presages the obsolescence of the institution of marriage:

> It could hardly have been otherwise in a novel which follows the marriage, divorce, and remarriage of not one but two ill-matched couples … each registering with extreme sensitivity … seismographically the shocks of the age. And, despite his disclaimers, the narrator's sympathies are clearly with those who saw marriage in the late nineteenth century as an institution which needed to be questioned (212).

Sue never finds emotional peace even after going back to Phillotson and reverts to dogma to quieten her inner turmoil. William Goetz maintains that Sue's manic stage in the later part of the novel is triggered by a lack of compatibility of her subjective ideology with the discursive space she found herself trapped in. It is a symbolic prostration of individual volition before oppressive institutions that dominate all aspects of subjective divergence from mainstream ideology (211). It is again in her state of mania and religious frenzy that relinquishes her previous notions and demands the crude enactment of law despite having vehemently criticized it. Jude invokes the absolute terror of institutional control, authority and cries: 'Sue! we are acting by the letter; and 'the letter killeth!' (376). He pleads to her that both were compromised and robbed of their ambitions with 'I was gin-drunk; you were creed-drunk. Either form of intoxication takes away the nobler vision' (378). However, Sue's natural urges do resurface even after she has remarried

Phillotson and deserted Jude. Her last words of consolation to Jude on the final meeting reinforce this line of reasoning. She acquiesces to him that it is 'only a church marriage - an apparent marriage I mean … a nominal marriage' (376).

4.4. Action Orientation

In common with James' Isabel Archer and Gissing's Monica Madden, the readers can easily identity a progressively shrinking personal space for Hardy's Sue Bridehead. Sue is confronted with a set of unique sociocultural and religious discourses that the author of the work engages in the novel. Like our heroines in the other two novels, Sue mounts a challenge to dominant narratives, only to be forced to a position of compete submission. This sudden transformation in Sue is baffling, since it translates into a total capitulation to discursively mediated conventions. It spells disaster for Sue in terms of her personal volition, deliberately keeping her capacity for rationality in check. On the other hand, Sue's decision to go back to her former husband, Phillotson following the death of her children turns Jude's world topsy-turvy. It throws the latter in a drunken oblivion where he remarries his former wife Arabella and soon after dies.

Sue's transformation as a penance seeking religious fanatic is a complete break with her former militant self. Towards the end of the book, the readers find her as an archetypal docile character, who has bowed down in complete subservience, drawing a parallel to the Foucauldian concept of biopower (*Discipline and Punish* 24). In the face of regulatory authority, she has completed the process of docilization. This has the deleterious effect of vitiating all kind of individual initiative, as it slowly and steadily leads the subject to total annihilation of individual volition. While in the case of the male protagonist Jude, the force of these entrenched social values, upholding the institution of marriage, proves almost impossible to withstand and his death is a figurative instance of total surrender. It was the logical culmination to a life of suffering which had started with Jude's first marriage with Arabella. At the time of his marriage with Arabella, Jude had sorely lamented that a momentary lapse in judgment can scuttle the entire course of a person's years of individual effort and intensive labor. In Jane Thomas's view, Jude is convinced that something must be 'wrong in a social ritual which made necessary a

cancelling of well-formed schemes' robbing him the opportunity to better himself (91). Jude reflects on the reality of marriage that:

> A transitory instinct which had nothing in it of the nature of vice and could be only at the most called weakness. He was inclined to inquire what he had done … to be caught in a gin which would cripple him … for the rest of a lifetime? (56).

Prior to her complete submission to her fate, Hardy does represent Sue resisting normative codes of conduct. In a revealing passage, Sue declares her scorn for the much-cherished Christminster, the fictional equivalent of Oxford, England. Christminster is the figurative center of authority for the discourses in the world of *Jude the* Obscure. Sue tells Jude 'I have no respect for Christminster whatever' … 'My friend I spoke of took that out of me. He was the most irreligious man I ever knew; and the most moral. And intellect at Christminster is new wine in old bottles (144).

Moreover, in another instance of her unconventionality, she affirms to Jude that she likes reading and says, 'I crave to get back to the life of my infancy, and its freedom' (132). It shows she does not take conventional ideals at face value and wants to free herself from the socially orchestrated web of gender specific roles. Sue's character provides a perfect example of an individual spirit bent of defying all preordained set of instructions for her gender. At first, she comes across as a true rebel who can easily identify the inherent hypocrisy in social customs. This disdain for convention is sewn into her personality. This nonconformity with the established conventions comes out in the episodes where Sue buys pagan figurines and brings them to her room even though her employer Miss Fontover is a deeply religious woman who is a regular member of the church (88). This spirit of nonconformity again surfaces when Sue escapes the training school and crosses a river on her feet and comes to Jude in her dripping wet clothes. She is by no means 'artless and natural' as Jude had thus far come to regard her (93).

However, Sue's transformation is so striking that even Jude is compelled to ask himself, 'can this be the girl who brought the Pagan deities into this most Christian city (340). This in her was foreshadowed throughout the novel. The contractual nature of marriage had terrified her from the beginning. The torment of cohabitation under the sanction of love proves unbearable for all parties concerned. Sue had distrusted the 'contracted obligation' and thought it was not less than a torture. Even Phillotson laments

to his friend Gillingham that living Sue in the absence of love was ‘daily, continuous tragedy’ (222). Victorian conventions dictated that the wife swear to a life of complete alliance to the would-be wife at the time of marriage, or the jilted husband could claim damages from his wife’s new consort. Phillotson did not invoke this clause as Jude was financially penurious. For Sue it was a daily torture to be bound by law to be ‘responsive to this man whenever he wishes’ (204). She is terrified of the officialdom of marriage. She is perplexed as to why two people in love must be ‘actuated by a dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter whose essence is voluntariness’ (204). Sue protests that she cannot remain ‘proof against the sordid conditions’ of matrimonial contract (275). Phillotson’s only defense to the situation is his invoking of religious injunctions with ‘you vowed to love me’ and that she is ‘committing a sin in not liking me’ (214). The marriage with Phillotson was, therefore, was built on rocky ground and Sue felt it had been rushed as he later confided to Jude.

Finding that her recourse to action is limited Sue bemoans it is not a tragedy borne out of love but ‘a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in a natural state would find relief in parting!’ (206). Her range of action is thwarted at every turn and the culprits are shrouded under the garb of conventions that prefer a particular mode of discourse construction. The heroine finds herself hobbled by forms whose discursive origin is beyond her immediate purview. Thus, Sue is no longer a subject assured of her ‘freedom from everything that’s gross’ (256). Her gender limits her scope for action and even her best friend and lover Jude can see her beyond her feminine sexuality as Jude thinks to him ‘If he could only get over the sense of her sex, as she seemed to be able to do so easily of his, what a comrade she would make’ (147). A combination of discursive factors, from the sociocultural limitations imposed on her on the account of her gender, social rejection for cohabitation with a lover out of wedlock and her own ideological make up contribute to her docilization. Therefore, these discursive signs finally get the better of her and she yields to the cultural ideology that makes slaves of even toughest of its detractors. According to Jane Thomas, this does make sense given that ‘contesting the social moulds means finding ‘alternatives to the prevailing and legitimate modes of feminine self-expression’ which is ruled out by contractual nature of marriage (57).

4.5. Positioning

Jane Thomas notes that Sue's gender defying character is accentuated as the readers see her in her 'transvestite garb' in Jude's apartment upon fleeing from her training school (139). This fluidity of gender makes her subjectivity amenable to 'concomitant forms of sexual expression' without being pigeonholed to a binary bracket of gender roles (Thomas 139). In a similar vein, Stephen Orgel concurs with Jane Thomas that the episode throws new light on Sue's positioning and her gender identity and regards it as 'the radical instability of our essence' (27). That lends a unique perspective on her positioning with effects on her gender subjectivity. Like the amorphous discursive phenomena without a fixed identifiable center, Sue is showcased as a free spirited individual whose positioning in not necessarily constrained by her gender identity. Sue Bridehead stands out as one of the most gender ambiguous heroines. Over the course of the novel, she lives with three different men and remains oblivious of the sexual tension that her presence creates. Richard Dellamora posits that this experiment is grounded in Sue's 'conventional ignorance' as to the 'the erotic investments involved in male friendships' (462). The fact that her sexuality is her least expressed component of her personality and triggered upon Arabella's sudden appearance on the scene lends credence to this line of reasoning.

Moreover, this epicene nature of her subjective self is not lost on Sue as she laments that 'the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns' (205). Sue Bridehead, given her fluidity in gender identity, finds it repulsive that she must be 'responsive to this man whenever he wishes' and to be bound by a 'dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter whose essence is its voluntariness!' (204). Sue's objections to the grotesqueness of the act must be seen in its context where it is representative of a period in Victorian England when the concept of marital rape was nonexistent (Thomas 193). Author Marjorie Garson contends that Hardy's Jude aspires for something that is not laid out in concrete terms, and he seeks 'a wholeness which completely transcends the body, does not depend upon the body – is intrinsically unrealizable' (157). To the end, Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* that gender differences along with physiological distinctions cannot be argued away as 'prediscursive' but are pretty much 'the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by

gender' (7). and that physical attributes and anatomical differences 'come into being in and through the mark(s) of gender' (8).

Hardy's eponymous Jude is subjected to the brunt of gender subjectivity and his range of ideological expression is similarly circumscribed. He protests that men suffer as much as women and women are better advised to protest the 'conditions' that serve as the breeding ground for those discourse that fuel their perpetuity as fed by strong patriarchal institutions. Therefore, putting the blame on the men alone would be missing the mark as 'he is only the helpless transmitter of the pressure put upon him' (277). Towards the end of the book Jude is once again entrapped by his former wife Arabella. A heavily intoxicated Jude believes that it is 'our old house by Marygreen'. Mr. Don, Arabella's father invokes patriarchal propriety with his 'You and my daughter have been living here together these three or four days, quite on the understanding that you were going to marry her. Of course I shouldn't have had such things going on in my house if I hadn't understood that. As a point of honour you must do it now' (370).

Towards the end of the novel, Sue resigns in total subjugation. This demonstrates the deeply entrenched nature of socio-cultural systems of thought that ensure the absolute submission of all dissenting voices. Sue at her worst cries out 'I've wrestled and struggled, and fasted and prayed, I have nearly brought my body into complete subjection' (377). She has, by now, transformed into a complete slave to creed and does its bidding with no questions asked. She acts out in a spirit sadomasochistic vengeance against herself for her sinful and heretic former self. This submission comes full circle with her longing that 'I wish something would take the evil right out of me, and all my monstrous errors, and all my sinful ways!' (333). In her deluded stage, she is convinced that a solemn oath of marriage cannot be undone by divorce. It may be borne in mind that she seeks total psychological oblivion to block out the painful memory of her dead children while Arabella is unperturbed even by Jude's death and joins the festivities outside, flirts with Velbert while Jude's dead body lies cold at her place (395). In the overall scheme of the novel, and through the narrative voice in the novel, Hardy has been able to bring into focus the inherent vices in the institution of marriage and the last two weddings by the end of the novel reinforce this sense of eternal loss as Sue and Jude once again sever their courses

with marriages to their ex-spouses. According to Goetz, this casts institutionalized marriage as a discursive practice that erodes natural freedom and subjective volition (212).

4.6. Practice

Keeping in view Sue Bridehead's limited range for dissenting action, and her peculiar position, she emerges as a more tragic figure than the eponymous protagonist of the novel, Jude. She oscillates between her rebellious vengeance against outdated social codes that do not consider subjective essence but use a fit-all pattern to force into subservience any erring individuals. Sue recognizes these 'forces' of patriarchal oppression as she tells Jude that society has enforced a set of artificial standards for conduct that bear no relations to natural individual instincts (197). To her, these forces of regulatory authority need to be resisted to claim a personal space of growth. She, nonetheless, acknowledges is not much that a person can do to offset this deeply entrenched scheme of things as society severely punishes those who upend moral boundaries. Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, through the suffering of its characters brings into juxtaposition the control exercised by regulatory authority with a natural state of things. These lay bare the oppressive authority of dominant ideology on gender kept in place through the patriarchal institution of marriage. According to William Goetz, both Sue and Jude are compromised by this failing institution 'whose spiritual bankruptcy and cruelty have already been conclusively demonstrated' (191).

Sue Bridehead is appalled at the formality of the contractual marriage. She tells Jude that it is 'foreign to a man's nature to go on loving a person when he is told that he must and should be that person's lover' and that in the absence of such an injunction and contractual obligation, he would be more likely to love and be loved (249). For her the presence of a 'contract' and the legal formality runs contrary to native human liberty and therefore such legally sanctioned unions fail (249). Sue's distrust of officialdom and legality of marriage turns her off to the ceremony and sparks her innate cynicism. As Jude signs the form of notice at the Registrar's office, Sue is appalled at the formality of this crude document that allowed no room for passion. The narrator captures Sue's state of the mind in the following manner:

> Names and Surnames of the Parties'—(they were to be parties now, not lovers, she thought). 'Condition'—(a horrid idea)—'Rank or Occupation'—'Age'—'Dwelling at'—'Length of Residence'—'Church or Building in which the Marriage is to be Solemnized'—'District and County in which the Parties respectively dwell'. 'It spoils the sentiment, doesn't it!' she said on their way home. 'It seems making a more sordid business of it even than signing the contract in the vestry' (270-271).

Life after marriage with Mr. Phillotson is a veritable torture for Sue. She treads lightly so as not to challenge his authority. She cringes at the banal finality and austere officialdom that comes with matrimony. The sense of resentment grows over time and solidifies as revulsion for institutionalized marriage and the oppressive control it exercises over its signatories. Interestingly, Sue's husband Phillotson invites a comparison with Mr. Widdowson of *The Odd Women.* Both are self-righteous and feel bewildered as to the appropriate line of action in the face wives who no longer love them. Although Monica Madden does not have Sue's advanced knowledge, she nonetheless, experiences a progressive disillusionment with patriarchal authority. They cannot reconcile their passions with the crude sanctions of the society. Thus, throughout the novel, marriage provides a broader thematic framework that influences all aspects of the characters that populate the story. Arabella uses marriage to trap Jude in a loveless marriage and deserts him as the heat of initial emotion abates and Jude sees Arabella for the first time without any mask of pretentions. This marriage with Arabella, nonetheless, haunts Jude for the remainder of his life and mars his every overture in life. It stultifies Jude's aspirations for a university education at Christminster. Jude laments how 'a social ritual made necessary a cancelling of well-formed schemes (56).

4.7. Subjectivity

Sue, according to Hardy, becomes a 'penance seeking Christian' by the end of the novel (Daniel 19). Sue implores Phillotson to take her back and he does so on the explicit stipulation that requires her to break with her old ways and give up her conventions. This is significant because Sue had felt nothing akin to real feeling for her former husband but had rather been repelled by him (352). Phillotson can be regarded as a figurative representative of Victorian gender ideology, and he wants Sue's capitulation to be complete with the renunciation of her former spirit. A subjective self that had cherished its freedom and reveled in non-conformity to arbitrarily imposed social codes of conduct.

Sue, having resigned to her situation, now promises to be the penitent and dutiful Christian wife as desired by Phillotson. Her return to him restores his authority as he notes that upon Sue return will 'set me right in the eyes of the clergy and orthodox laity, who have never forgiven me for letting her go. So I may get back in some degree into my old track' (354). It does take a substantial emotional toll on Sue. Hardy describes her as wearing the look of a 'condemned criminal who catches sight of his coffin' (352). This testifies that she has submitted to the dogmas she once reviled. In conformity to her transformed self, she speaks of sin and goes to Church to make amends declaring 'it is my duty. I will drink my cup to the dregs!' (383). As observed earlier, this transformation of the female protagonist is striking because Hardy's heroine served as an early flag bearer of the emancipated feminist who takes issue with the idea of being 'licensed to be loved on the premises' (249). She now can only find inner peace if accepted on those very 'premises' that she resented the most. Despite her submission to the regulatory authority, her state of being 'creed drunk' (378), does nothing to quieten the inner storm of her soul. She is, in fact, still in love with Jude and forces herself to align her divergent views along the lines dictated by creed. Arabella is justifiably prompted to note that Sue would never find peace to her inner turmoil until she is dead like Jude with 'she's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now!' (397).

Hardy's Sue is deeply conflicted in her subjective self and is forced to reckon with multiple layers of her discursive environment. At times she is filled with self-doubt and despair and cannot reconcile with her identity that pulls her in a different direction. This distance from her own subjectivity comes out when she refers to herself with Jude as 'your faulty and tiresome little Sue' (147) and again 'poor wicked woman who is trying to mend' (349).

Hardy makes it abundantly clear through the narrative voice and the plot structure that Sue's subjective conditioning precipitates her emotional downfall to the point of utter mania. The readers are encouraged to view Sue's capitulation in the context of the discursive narratives of Victorian England that function through multifaceted channels and codify subjective ideology. These mechanisms operate with aid of amorphous networks of ideological pressure points with no visible points of identification. At times, the interconnectivity of these discourse structures makes them hard to figure out with any

degree of specificity. Sue's self-immolation to Jude is akin to a woman in a crowd abusing 'the man who crushes against her, when he is only the helpless transmitter of the pressure put upon him' (277).

Sue lying 'prostrate at the paving' (338) is representative of the spirit that fought but eventually fell in the face of forces that completely overwhelmed her. It thus stands to reason why Victorian marriage has often been likened to the inhumanity of slavery. As in the latter, the masters invariably subsume the identities of slave upon entering bondage, so does institutionalized marriage rob women of their subjective identity. We see a transition of Sue from a woman finds it abhorrent that she must adopt the surname 'Mrs. Fawley', to a penitence seeking religious fanatic, prostrate before God for her salvation. Sue had, at the time, reacted as if a part of her subjective self had been wrung away from her. This accounts for her subsequent 'dull, cowed, and listless' attitude (278). Subsequent upon the death of her children and social rejection on account of her cohabitation with Jude, Sue submits to the supremacy of discursive practices that force her to fit the mould of subjectivity expected of her. She has absorbed those discursive practices at a subconscious level, and they rush to the surface when she is at her emotional weakest point. Rosemarie Morgan notes that Sue, by now, willingly acquiesces to these control mechanisms and is a veritable pawn in the patriarchal game of chess and is therefore the first one to be compromised (Morgan 83). It is significant that Sue's conflict with her landlady, Miss Fontover, earlier in the novel had resulted in the destruction of her pagan images, and she starts working as a teacher at Mr. Phillotson's school (97). Miss Fontover typifies the feminine discourse of Christianity and in an instance that is unlikely to be lost on the readers. Sue's final capitulation to dogma is captured in her prostration at St Silas Church in Beersheba where Miss Fontover is a regular worshipper. Rosemarie Morgan notes that Sue's final capitulation is one of the most depressing elements in Hardy's novel (70). A true fighter against all man-made conventions surrenders to the authority of discourse by the end. In a way, her loveless marriages with a man whom she detests can be viewed as a masochistic self-harm for sue who had once suggested that the ills of institutionalized and the harm it does to the partners be announced 'upon housetops' (201). Furthermore, it was Sue who thought marriage as it stood was a hallowed institution but rather 'sordid contract' (202). She declares to Jude:

> I think I should begin to be afraid of you, Jude, the moment you had contracted to cherish me under a Government stamp, and I was licensed to be loved on the premises by you' (249).

Another noteworthy instance in how the mechanics of gender subjectivity operate under Victorian gender ideology, emerges as Mr. Phillotson justifies to himself his treatment of Sue within the deeply entrenched patriarchal discourse on gender. When Sue asks for his permission to leave him and go and live with his cousin Jude. Phillotson, drawing a parallel with Gissing's Widdowson, is deeply conflicted in the face of established Victorian gender ideology and his own subjectivity. They both feel a sense of entitlement over their wives and are bewildered when faced with objective reasoning. Phillotson remarks:

> I, like other men, profess to hold that if a husband gets such a so-called preposterous request from his wife, the only course that can possibly be regarded as right and proper and honourable in him is to refuse it, and put her virtuously under lock and key, and murder her lover perhaps (222).

Jude the Obscure captures the widening hold of values enforced through institutional authority and their systematic suppression of individual liberty. Jane Thomas remarks that *Jude the Obscure* showcases a space where authoritarian discourse undermines individual aspiration for change and punishes those who do not abide by its rigid code of conduct (Thomas 38). The shock of the death of her children jolts her out of her momentary resentment to authority. The episode instils in Sue a submission to the erstwhile abhorred authority, and she offers herself as a sacrificial animal to Mr. Phillotson despite her lack of feeling for him. When Sue abandons her former self and, by association anything that reminded her of her former 'heretic' life, Jude becomes a victim proxy, and his world falls apart too. Jude is robbed of all reasons for resistance and he, in turn, succumbs to his fate of going back to a marriage that had marred him throughout his short miserable existence. In one of the significant moments of her literal and figurative submission to gender subjectivity, Sue offers herself to Phillotson and is seen 'crouched before him in her night-clothes' telling him that it was her 'duty' to love him (385-386). This is a complete break for the Sue of the past who had had a very non-conventional demeanor from her childhood. There had been a portrait of Sue furnished early in the novel by Aunt Drusilla who recalled her as a 'pert little thing … with her tight-strained

nerves' and she saw her in the pond with her shoes and stockings off telling her to move on as it was 'no sight for modest eyes' (104).

To sum up, Sue is an archetypical figure of the fin de siècle independent woman, who had to negotiate her inner disquiet with the contemporary scheme of gender discourses and the external stimuli that sought to make her conform to established conventions. This is in line with Foucault's idea of subjective body being a space for the solidification of cultural rules, system of hierarchies (*Discipline and Punish* 153). Although Jude facilitates her self-discovery by giving her the requisite space, the tragic turn of events reroutes them to their respective tragic ends. Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* is a masterful exploration of how discursive practices influence individual conduct and condition gender subjectivity. It would not be amiss to observe that Hardy's Sue Bridehead is a deeply conflicted character who attempts to live out her life on her own terms but, eventually, must bend to the power of discourses beyond her. She gets completely overwhelmed by the latent forces of what Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* had called 'biopower' and is disciplined through the techniques of sociocultural discourse of gender (141). The novel, nonetheless, was an important platform for Hardy to lay open an exposé of the social and psychological conditioning of women that seeks to fit them in roles designed by patriarchal structures of power that are self-sustaining. It is the exploitation of women in matrimony and the practice is rationalized with the aid of gender discourses championed by patriarchal institutions. The novel, through its engagement with these discourses, invites readers to review what is often taken for granted in established socio-cultural values.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the principal women protagonists in three selected novels: James' *The Portrait of a Lady*, Gissing's *The Odd Women* and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* in terms of their engagement with the discourses on gender subjectivity within a dominant patriarchal institution of marriage. Through Carla Willig's analytical tools and building upon FDA, the primary focus of the study was to analyse if the three authors depict the subject characters as forces of resistance who refute the regulatory authority or alternately portray them as docile characters who engage in policing their subjective selves and accordingly discipline their conduct to be more in tune with the epistemic discourses. Now, this regulatory power is central to the examination of these discourses as, in FDA, it emanates from and is sustained by dominant narratives through the operations of power/knowledge dynamics that produce their own truths (The *History of Sexuality* 84). The thesis, therefore, mapped and examined discourses on gender subjectivity and marriage within the epistemic space of late nineteenth century Victorian England through the three the selected novels. A thorough explication of the dominant discourses reveals how gender ideology functioned and the way it enforces its patriarchal mores in intricate ways.

Carla Willig's analytical tools for tapping into the discursive repertoires of the epistemic environments of the novels unveils the contingent factors that play a pivotal role in how gendered subjectivity is formed, which essentially contributes to the construction of the protagonists' worldview. The dissertation explored the interplay between discursive practices on gender and marriage in the late Victorian novels. It aimed at unearthing sociocultural discourses that facilitated and played a role in engendering values which favored an episteme of gender discourse that subjected women to a position of inferiority through age-old social institutions i.e., marriage and their valorization by patriarchal traditions of oppression by the control of dominant gender narratives.

The thesis has demonstrated, through its explorations of discourses of gender subjectivity and marriage in the selected novels, *The Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James, *The Odd Women* by George Gissing, and finally *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy that the epistemic environments of the novels facilitated the ascendency of discourses that

sustained the gender ideology of the time. The protagonists, although resisting at the onset, eventually lost out to the dominant narratives and submited to values cherished by them. The novels demonstrate that marriage as an institution that seeks validation from the patronage of a host of patriarchal discourses that offers no room for personal space for women. That is illustrated through a plurality of themes on marriages that are nothing more than prisons of tacit oppression that tax the protagonists physically, psychologically, and emotionally. Moreover, it emerges that the deeply ingrained gender ideology, that the institution of marriage it relies on, is a patriarchal tool for oppression and will remain so unless checked through introspective examination of discursive practices as laid out in the epistemic environments of the novels.

The submission of the female characters in the novels to the regulatory power of late nineteenth century discourses on gender subjectivity as exercised through the institution of marriage provides some invaluable insight into the interplay of dominant narratives that rely on the strength of the dynamics of knowledge, power, and truth. Powerful women characters, despite initial display of resistance, are pushed to the losing end of bargain. This is underscored through the struggles of James' Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady,* Monica Madden and Rhoda Nunn in George Gissing's *The Odd Women* and Sue Bridehead in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure.* They reveal discursive practices that occlude individual growth with the aid of dominant gender narratives, and any form of challenge to them, in terms of counter discourse, is defeated by patriarchal traditions propelled by religious values. In the face of discourses on gender roles that uphold subjectivity through the institution of marriage, we see the protagonists invariably giving up and offering themselves up in complete subjugation. It has been observed that gender subjectivity is artificially manufactured and held in place, maintained and controlled by patriarchal institutions and the institution of marriage functions as one of the most important elements that enforces the regulatory authority of discourses. That authority is derived from the established episteme, which according to Foucault, has a symbiotic relationship with the discourses it champions as they in turn define and constitute its organizing set of values (*Archeology of Knowledge* 214). He also maintained in his *The History of Sexuality* that subjective identities, sexual orientations, and gender are a product

of sociocultural construction and are rooted in history and, therefore, also contingent on their epistemic environment (10).

Within the wider gender discourses in the novels, institutionalized marriage comes with a baggage of sociocultural and religious values that favour the dominant narratives on gender that define gender roles. The women protagonists of the three novels i.e., Isabel Archer, Monica Madden, and Sue Bridehead cannot help but conform to the power of dominant narratives of control and gender subjectivity. Through the analysis of the three novels written in the last two decades of Victorian England, it has been noticed that the prevalent epistemic environment is sustained by a set of sociocultural values that functions more as an ideological dynamic than a set of self-contained truth claims.

Investigating the late Victorian episteme for the purposes of understanding how sociocultural discourses evolve over time is crucial in unearthing perspectives for alternative courses of actions with consequences for the future generations and researcher at large. Insights into how the epistemic discourses functioned and affected the authors and their works, although miniscule and incremental in genealogical terms can, over time lead to major changes in how those discourses affect sociocultural values.

Within the landscape of the three late Victorian novels, it has been observed that modes of gender subjectivity undergo changes in line with the epistemic currents and produces the concomitant discourses. As demonstrated in the theoretical framework of this study, FDA claims discourses are not static, they continuously undergo genealogical changes thorough history, and so do sociocultural values and attendant gender ideologies which are in turn influenced by those discourses. (*The History of Sexuality* 141). In this regard, it is observed that Henry James' *The Portrait of Lady* treads with extreme caution in terms of its portrayal of an entrapped wife subjected to the torments of institutionalized marriage where much of the impetus for her final decision of forsaking her individual aspirations and going back to a vile husband sets well with the stream of late Victorian discourses and what was expected of a woman in such a marriage. Isabel Archer gets mired in a loveless union with a man who entered the contract of marriage with her on false pretenses who denies her any space growth. James' *The Portrait of a Lady*, therefore, presents a heroine who is defeated by circumstances beyond her control and her personal

aspirations are sacrificed at the altar of convenience. Lyall Powers remarks that Henry James augments Isabel's powers of 'imagination, her searing intellect and consciousness' and puts more emphasis on the interiority of the protagonist (105). Even her sudden rise in financial wealth proves a bane for her in disguise and precipitates her fall. Her character is an exposé of inexperience, personal folly, and finally an attitude of a wife who is resigned to her fate. The main takeaway from the novel is how seemingly highly educated women with a powerful individual spirit finally succumb to form and authority and present themselves the procrustean bed of conformity as willing victims.

Moreover, James' *The Portrait of a Lady* examines gender roles and sexuality within the discursive framework of Victorian mores. Isabel's yearning for independence can be read as a metaphorical illustration her of wish for sexual freedom. The novel also depicts how Isabel's self-imposed injunctions on the proprietary of married conduct contrasts with the ideological forbidden, but subjectively passionate last kiss with Casper Goodwood before she wrings herself free to go back to passionless marriage with Gilbert Osmond. The contrast in the forces of social values and subjective feelings brings into focus the artificiality of narratives that deny subjective freedom and circumscribe range of choice. As Annette Niemtzove notes, towards the end of the novel, Isabel is forced to serve as a 'custodian of domestic organization' (381). This is notwithstanding her explicit declaration that she did not want to 'begin life by marrying'. And that there were 'other things a woman could do' (217). Dorothy Berkson notes that Henry James uses the institution of marriage coupled with a counterintuitive ending to demonstrate to the readers 'the tragedy that can face a young woman whose culture provides her with no serious alternatives to marriage and which expects her to marry before she has experienced life and gained the wisdom necessary for judgment' (68– 69).

In the end, James' *The Portrait of a Lady* successfully captures the multiplicity of the discursive field as captured through Isabel's struggles with the mutually exclusive forces of moral commitments in the face of a dominant gender ideology. It also captures individual aspirations for independence that women were faced with in Victorian England. Isabel's sealing herself away from Casper Goodwood portrays her psychological conflict and she flees before her inner voice of reason impedes her way. Thus, within the wider framework of James' work, institutionalized marriage emerges as a culturally sanctioned

straitjacket that precludes opportunities for psychological and emotional development. This narrative is elucidated with the depiction of the sham marriage of the Touchetts, who remain in a matrimonial bond while remaining physically and emotionally detached from each other. In a way, Lydia Touchett's dysfunctional marriage foreshadows Isabel's entrapment in a prison of a marriage with the sinister Gilbert Osmond. There is then no wonder that Isabel's inexperience and romantic view of the world leave her unprepared for the seismic changes in her life with the sudden leap into riches as she becomes a prey to predators like madam Merle and Gilbert Osmond. This naiveté on the part of Isabel factors in her loss of subjective volition and her independence of spirit as it had been erected on false grounds and incomplete understanding of the external world (Edel 14). She is unable to grasp the 'misery of the world' (94). Even when she realizes that 'she had had personal acquaintance with wickedness' (696), it does not suffice to extricate herself from the conventionally imposed rules of propriety and gets away from Gilbert Osmond. This is despite Isabel's 'deep distrust of her husband' even before she learns of his affair with Madame Merle. Gilbert Osmond was wary of Isabel's independence and, at one point after the marriage, point blank confronts her for her 'too many ideas and she must get rid of them (577). As Cheryl Torsney remarks, Isabel is 'manipulated and invaded by forces eager to bring her under their control' (86). Despite her windfall of fortune, she signs off on her rights to liberty in marrying Gilbert Osmond.

The overall tone of the text reflects the influence of the contemporary discourses on the author. According to Kurt Hochenauer, Isabel's abandonment of her prior values and going back to Gilbert Osmond can also be seen in the context of the author's 'divided self' in the matters of gender liberation in the face of dominant ideology (23). This strand of thinking is further corroborated in Niemtzow's assertion that the protagonist's actions by the end of the book also reflect the author's and his father's published attitude towards the institution of marriage i.e., 'one is responsible for one's own choices' (382).

However, in the case of our second novel, *The Odd Women,* the author George Gissing is more representative of the fin de siècle New Woman movement and advances his arguments on gender roles and Victorian marriage with less restraint. It examines how religion and theology aid the continuance of age-old dogmas that make victims of women. In the book, the readers are introduced to Monica Madden who has imbibed the dominant

narratives of gender. She, nonetheless, feels suffocated in a marriage where her subjective volition is completely disregarded and her patriarchal husband, much in common with James' Gilbert Osmond and his treatment of Isabel Archer, wants to rob her of her individuality and invokes patriarchal values of marital responsibility and religious injunctions to love the husbands unconditionally. George Gissing uses a separate set of issues to examine current discursive practices. Set in an epoch where New Women's movements had just begun taking momentum, the novel encompasses the changing attitude to gender dynamics. Rhoda Nunn is emblematic of a new liberated woman who, despite her notions for the rights of women, must take into full consideration social mores and ask for church marriage when tested on her views by Everard Barfoot. Rhoda Nunn regards marriage as an oppressive institution that fosters inequality between the husband and wife through the support of dominant gender ideology, that is the reason she thinks of marriage as something to be sedulously prevented. She says:

> I would have girls taught that marriage is a thing to be avoided rather than hoped for. I would teach them that for the majority of women marriage means disgrace' (112).

The influence of contemporary discourses on the construction of gender roles within the institution of marriage is best illustrated by John Ruskin's *Of Queen's Gardens*, where he wants wives to be 'incorruptibly good' so that they can be always by the side of her husbands, not as means for self-improvement but for the peace and comfort of the husbands who brave the outside world. Wives must the infallible paragon of virtue, devoting themselves to the care of their husbands (Ruskin 45). In the novel, Everard Barfoot calls it 'the consecrated form of domestic happiness' (197). Moreover, Gissing's Edmund Widdowson Hardy's Richard Phillotson explicitly invoke this Ruskinian ideal of women underscoring the direct correlation of gender discourses with the dominant narratives in their epistemic production.

Gissing's novel goes against the grain of traditional gender roles with the development of original characters who eschew stereotypical views of women. This type is channeled through Gissing's Mary Barfoot, who stands for self-reliance in women who fail to make the marriage equation. While the protagonist of Gissing's novel, Monica Madden, succumbs to a miserable marriage in her efforts to find economic security, her

husband, Edmund Widdowson, stifles her personal space and drives her premature death at childbirth. Monica's elder sisters Alice and Virginia, in the absence of better recourses, are driven to religiosity and alcoholism, respectively. Thus, the novel is populated by a conflict of gender and class in the backdrop of the new women who sought to redefine the confines of subjective ambition within the discourse ideology of the period.

Gissing's *The Odd Women*, with its multiplicity of gender dialogues, portrays the transitory period in the late Victorian England where interlocking discursive strands vied for supremacy. The resultant lack of specificity in arriving at neat conclusions in the presence of labile gender discourses underscores the major thematic agenda in the novel. Gissing appears hamstrung by the different strands of narratives, making it an uphill task to negotiate a space for women without compromising existing social distinctions given that gender construction is determined by socio-economic conditions. In their present state, the conditions promised nothing more than gross inequity for women. Although the diffuse nature of gender discourses occlude reaching equitable solutions, Gissing engenders debate on the institution of marriage by revealing its inherent biased gender role expectations that lead to the oppression of women, robbing them of their independence of spirit. It is a world where marriage no longer remains unscathed by different voices of resistance. The book also examines the alternatives to institutionalized marriage and opportunities that come from getting women properly trained in different vocations so that matrimony no longer remains the only viable option.

Thirdly, in the last novel of the study, Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* directly engages contemporary narratives of the late Victorian period. It is more forthcoming in its vitriolic attack on inbred cultural values on gender subjectivity and the inequities inherent in legalized marriage. The readers see that Sue Bridehead, in her total disregard of conventional wisdom and discursive values, appears more advanced than James' Isabel Archer or even Gissing's militant feminist Rhoda Nunn and her sudden transformation makes it more though provoking. This makes her eventual submission to a creed induced mania more thought provoking. Again, her submission draws parallels with Isabel's capitulation in the shape going back to a husband she hates and Monica Madden's sense of total abandonment as she is entrapped in draconian Victorian marriage. The latter's resistance to the authority results in her paying with her own life. According to Jane

Thomas, Sue Bridehead is Hardy's account of the 'limited powers of the self under the constraints of history and patriarchy (17). Hardy's Sue is checked by regulatory power in her pursuit of subjective sovereignty in the exercise of her choice. It springs from her desire to build a degree of personal space for herself which had long been denied to women (Thomas 66).

Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* is more in sync with the period of its production. It engages the major discursive forces in the late Victorian period: the exclusivity of access to education with the middle class, the increasing sense of empowerment in women who were growing cognizant of gender roles thrust upon them by the patriarchal forces, and vestigial currants of religion that manifested themselves across strands of life. Above all, *Jude the Obscure* is an account of the incompatibility of institutionalized marriage with this period of transition and change. The characters live and learn through their experiences. The eponymous Jude does not much experience of the world and its only by the end of the book that he abandons his previous beliefs. In this way, the Jude's growth through harsh realities of life is like the tribulations of James' Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* and Gissing's Monica Madden in *The Odd Women*. They set out with simplistic views on the nature of external reality and learn after the fact of discursive forces beyond their immediate interiority.

In short, the novel's subtitle, *the letter killeth,* specifically references the legality of marriage and the contractual nature oppresses women. It may be seen in the backdrop of Sue's remarriage with Phillotson. The latter, despite his traditional temperament, acknowledges to his friend and long-term confidant, Mr. Gillingham that:

> That merely taking a woman to church and putting a ring upon her finger could by any possibility involve one in such a daily, continuous tragedy as that now shared by her and me! (223).

The three late Victorian novelists engage discourses on gender and marriage within the epistemic space of late 19th century England. In these three novels, it is observed that the portrayals of new women protagonists always involves an unhappy marriage. The discourse defines the characters and like the authors themselves, the women characters live out their lives in an environment where all their ideological positions are confined by the dominant narratives. It appears that fighting those discourses proves to be an exercise

in futility. Gissing's *The Odd Women*, however, does stand out for the multiplicity of subject positions it offers. There is the victimized and Foucauldian docile character, Monica Madden but the book also engages discourses of gender subjectivity and explores the institution of marriage from the perspective of a conformist like Everard Barfoot, a militant feminist Rhoda Nunn and a voice in the middle who wants the progress of women within the terms of the reigning discourses, Ms. Mary Barfoot.

Notwithstanding the initial rejection of imposed patriarchal roles and despite aspirations for experiences different than offered on inequitable terms by discursive practices in vogue, our women protagonists fall before the power of regulatory authority. The explication of the constituent elements of this regulatory power is made possible through the analytical lens of Carla Willig's model as expounded in the theoretical framework. It was instrumental in first exploring and mapping all discourses and their modes of construction in the three novels. It was followed by assessing the subjective *Action Orientation* of the characters that set them towards roles (*Positioning*) and ensuring courses of action (*Practice*) based on the available discourses. The final stage examined the resulting subjectivity of the characters that emerged in the light of the gender discourses on their subjectivity as an effect of a deeply well-established patriarchal institution i.e., marriage in late Victorian England. It has been noted, as revealed by the analysis of the novels, that all forms of regulatory authority enforce their set of values by appealing to traditional truth claims and marriage emerges as one the disciplining institutions of the regulatory authority.

The findings of the study at hand, resonate with the Foucauldian notion of discourses in terms of explaining how the apparently powerful women subjects in the three novels eventually become victims and surrender to the authority of regulatory power. It must be seen in the context of the fact that the Foucauldian conception of biopower works in close coordination with the process of subjective docilization, or creating self-disciplining, self-policing subjects who interiorize the mechanics of regulatory power. Thus, subjectivity through discourses is not entirely achieved through external forces but with the willing participation of the subjects themselves. According to Michel Foucault (*Discipline and Punish*), the process of creating docile subjects is subtle and may even work on a subconscious level:

> The body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs (25).

Therefore, the thesis has built upon Foucault's theory of discourses and their relationship with power and knowledge that erect structures of power which in turn solidify narratives of ideology which seek to subjugate women and make them a victim through legalized marriage. It has been observed that all three writers have created women characters with an attitude of resistance to the lopsided scheme of things in terms of gender ideology. However, the fact that despite the difference in their circumstances and nature of personal obstacles, the dominant discourses become insurmountable, and their fall is underscored by the plot structures of the authors. It appears that the women protagonists have been deprived of their subjective agency and their ideological outlook is governed by discourses that afford them no scope for independence of action.

Furthermore, the accounts of gender dynamics within the confines of late Victorian England, do afford a fresh perspective on how social values revolve around a set of discourses that are ever changing. The novels map the discursive practices through the character analysis of female protagonists who mount a challenge to the system but apparently lose out at the end. However, the engagement of these discourses and the ideological bulwarks behind them nonetheless expose the chinks in the systems and the inadequacy of the criteria they are based on. It is directly in line with the Bakhtinian idea of 'polyphony', where there is simultaneous expression of a multiplicity of dissenting voices that carry equal weight without a distinct ascendant ideology (Baldick 199). Although, the women characters under analysis do succumb to the pressures of regulatory power by the end of the novel, their voicing of dissent from the establish values invites readers to the alternative worldviews. This makes FDA a fascinating tool for examining epistemic discourses in culturally significant novels. The force of modern value systems and entrenched moral authority can be reviewed by reexamining periodic discourses in their time of production.

As to the delimitations of the study, being a vast area, it is hard to encompass all angles of the arguments on the gender discourses in late Victorian England, the study has, therefore confined itself with one epistemic space in the landscape of these three novels.

It has largely been an examination of the epistemes the late Victorian period that dictate the terms of all systems of knowledge and dominant cultural discourses that shaped the subjectivities of the characters. Moreover, Michel Foucault's theoretical framework offers a cogent set of tools for delineating the amorphous and decentered nature of discourses within the novels. It encourages readers to view social values and all types of all-encompassing dominant narratives as contingent on historical contexts and open to examination. If armed with this perspective, it can lead to newer ways of analysis with the use of a critical lens that does not accept any phenomena at their face value.

An important takeaway from the examination of late nineteenth century discourses reveals that all established systems of knowledge must be continually examined and reexamined, and nothing should be accepted at face value. Although power dynamics function in subtlest of ways, individual resistance can reveal chinks in the armor of disciplining institutions. Therefore, a constant vigilance and resistance on the part of subjects can serve as a safety valve to the authoritarian display of regulatory authority. Michel Foucault's toolkit for discourse analysis challenges how people perceive power and dominant narratives in cultures. His accounts of how discursive practices evolve over time and how they manifest themselves as subjective consciousness can be very insightful. To Foucault , history is never a clean linear account of all the events that have occurred. For him, the historical context of events is the key to their understanding of the power structures of the period. Changing discourses mean that a shift has taken place in terms of switching from physical punishment to the control and disciplining of the minds and subjugation of bodies as he had argued that categories of gender and identity, coupled with expressions of sexual desires are invariably influenced by the interplay of sociocultural ideologies on gender dynamics resulting from the effects of institutions (*History of Sexuality* 147). Dominant cultural narratives are not an objective codified set of facts about the way the universe functions. As per FDA, gender discourse or all discursive practices in general do not derive their authority from a natural scheme of things but are artificial constructions of the regulatory power within an episteme. Subjects can break the cycle of oppression by resisting those discourses by exercising their individual will which results in different dynamics in power/knowledge relationship. It may be kept in view that these discourses of a dominant ideology are not concrete entities that can be easily rejected or

consciously incorporated into subjective value systems. They are rather much more volatile and constantly changing, making their impact felt in the topical issues of the Victorian period.

It has been observed that the authors chosen for the study are equally susceptible to the forces of the discursive practices that shape their worldviews and, by proxy, the subjectivities characters they bring to life in their works. The cultural significance of these novels is borne out by the fact that they influence and shape the contemporary discourses on gender and marriage, as well as are equally influenced by them. Therefore, the cumulative effect of understanding how discourses influence the course of dominant narratives allows the possibility of newer means of individual independence and greater understanding of sociocultural power structures. It is to be noted that within their fictional worlds, the novelists have engaged with the complex challenges of gender discourses and illustrated the inherent paradoxes in the contemporary issues around the institution of marriage in the late nineteenth century England. Although the interlocking nature of the socio-cultural narratives makes it particularly hard to arrive at neat conclusions, the study has offered a fresh perspective on how discourses on marriage and gender subjectivity function.

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