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'Elegant Economy' in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*: A Socialist Feminist Study

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Abstract- Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) was a Victorian writer who had to undergo various kinds of condescension for her writings. After bearing the stigma of being conformist, conventional, and meek as ascribed to her by the contemporary feminist critics, Gaskell's writings are being revisited with a new feminist perspective in recent years. The present paper is also a humble attempt to rediscover the feminist dimension of her writings by exploring one of her novels, *Cranford* (1853), through a socialist feminist lens. *Cranford* presents such a social structure that is devoid of a Class system and constructed by women in a matrilineal society as against the capitalist patriarchal society of *Drumble*. This Matriarchal socialist social structure is based on the values of cooperation, humanity, and motherly care characteristic to the differently developed gendered subjectivity of women. The social change through the agency of woman foreshadows Gaskell's far-sighted feminist views of the 1970s.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), a Victorian Woman novelist, began her writing career in an era when 'Feminism' was not even established as a theory. The contemporary Victorian feminists not only ignored her writings but strongly disproved any possibility of feminist dimension in her literary works. The critics like W. R. Greg, David Cecil, Raymond Williams, and Arnold Kettle labeled Gaskell as a second rank writer criticizing her as a meek writer with a feeble hold on structure and characterization. Her name had gone into oblivion for being a conformist, submissive, conventional and emotional woman writer writing with no purpose.

After the 1950s, Gaskell's writings began to be revisited by feminist critics who unveiled the feminist, political and social significance of her writings. With the appearance of Ania Rubenius's *The Woman Question in Elizabeth Gaskell's Life and Works* (1950), Annette Hopkins's *Elizabeth Gaskell: her Life and Works* (1952), Kathleen Tillotson's *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (1954), Edgar Wright's *Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment* (1965) etc. Gaskell earned a new recognition. Pasty Stoneman wrote *Elizabeth Gaskell* (1987), the first avowedly feminist study of Gaskell's work. Stoneman refuted all earlier criticism of Gaskell and brought forth the characteristic of 'maternal thinking'

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in her novels with new feminist light through her exploration of it as the base of social evolution. Hilary M. Schor, in *Scheherezade in the Marketplace* (1992) draws attention to Gaskell's unconventional stance in centering her plot on female protagonists. With all these critics, Gaskell regained her lost ground.

This research is also an attempt in this drive to re-establish Gaskell as a major writer by exploring new feminist dimensions of her writings. Gaskell lived in an age of the Industrial Revolution, and the socio-economic changes impelled by it divided English Society based on Class and Gender, "The society in which Gaskell lived and wrote was intersected horizontally by class and vertically by gender divisions" (Stoneman, 2006, p. 6). Gaskell's novels address both the divisions, and through this study, I have tried to seek a link between Gaskell's address to 'Woman Question' and her address to the social problem of 'Class Conflict.' In her novels Gaskell proposes an alternative social structure based on equality and compassion, which is accomplished and managed through women's agency by imparting them significant roles in the public sphere and social production refuting the traditional Victorian domestic ideology. The interconnection between 'Woman Question' and 'Class Conflict' or 'Patriarchy' and 'Capitalism' makes 'Socialist Feminism' an apt device to examine her novels, as Gender and Class are the two integral halves of Socialist Feminist Theory. This work commences with a glance at the early Victorian Feminism moving ahead to elaborate upon Socialist Feminist standpoint and finally ends up exploring Gaskell's novel, *Cranford* (1853) in the light of Socialist Feminism.

II. VICTORIAN FEMINISM

The notion of Victorian Feminism is hard to pin down as the term 'Feminism' itself was coined towards the end of the nineteenth century. I have attempted to trace the idea of Victorian Feminism by focusing upon some of the significant features and undercurrents brought to the fore by some of the contemporary feminist writers. After the feminist stir of the 1790s which came up with writers like Mary Wollstonecraft's "A *Vindication of the Rights of Women*" (1792) and the novels of her contemporary, Mary Hays, the significant feminist move took impetus in the 1840s with the debate on 'Gender.' The feminist study of Gender being socially and culturally constructed exposes the Victorian

ideology of gender hierarchy with men in the center, "Cultural critic Raymond Williams saw the 1840s as a kind of watershed decades for masculinity and femininity, arguing in particular that these years saw a deepening division between the emotions thought proper for men and women to display" (Glover, 2000, p. 19).

Barbara Caine, in her book *Victorian feminists* (1993), asserts that the historian and the contemporary Feminists of the late 1970s and early 1980s criticize Victorian feminist movements for "its sexual prudery, its refusal to acknowledge the existence of women's sexuality and its absolute failure to address the question of women's sexual pleasure" (Caine, 1993, p. x). Victorian Feminists dealt with the very basic question of the 'equality' and 'difference' between men and women, "indeed, Victorian domestic ideology, centering as it did on the notion of separate spheres for women and men, on the intellectual, moral and emotional differences between men and women, and on the moral superiority of women, was at least as important in the formulation of feminist thought as was liberal political and economic theory" (Caine, 1993, p. 21).

Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Emily Devies, Frances Cobbe, Josephine Butler, Fawcett are named as prominent Victorian feminists. Paradoxically, although these feminists voiced against the prevalent inequality and unjustifiable conditions of women, they are ultimately found to comply with the patriarchal Victorian domestic ideology. Wollstonecraft's views on women's sexuality endorse the Victorian double standard of sexuality, as she admits the necessity of constraints on women's sexual freedom. Wollstonecraft's antifeminist perspective towards women's sexuality is also criticized,

For Kaplan, it is the emphasis on the sexual that is most problematic and most significant in Wollstonecraft. The analysis of sensibility and pleasure as instruments of patriarchal control, the account of how women's sexuality and dependency are constructed both in the existing state of society and in the writings of Rousseau, are evident in the *Vindication*, but rather than attacking them through a demand for women's control of their own sexuality, Wollstonecraft insists on a puritan sexual ethic for women. (Caine, 1993, p. 25).

Another significant figure in the Women's movement is John Stuart Mill, who added a new edge to it by writing *Subjection of Women*. Mill's arguments were mainly focused on married women and their problems; the problems of single women and prostitution were left out by him. Although he brought forth the unfair laws of the marriage of Victorian women, however, he spoke in favor of women's domestic sphere as natural and morally obligatory. "Zillah Eisenstein commented on the way in which Mill, despite his powerful critique of the subordination of women, none the less perpetuates the patriarchal division of male and female sexual spheres

in his insistence that it is both likely and desirable that most women will continue in their domestic role, leaving income-earning activity and involvement in the public sphere to men or to exceptional single women" (Caine, 1993, p. 37).

Among the prominent socio-economic-political changes in Victorian England were the development of science and liberalism. The feminist movement was greatly influenced by liberalism that believed in family and domestic life being segregated from the outer public and social life. Private domestic sphere being the center of women's life consequently fell apart from political and social public life. "For liberalism, as both Carole Pateman and Zillah Eisenstein have shown, has always accepted the existing European sexual division of labor and the basically patriarchal family structure that this entails" (Caine, 1993. Print., p. 38). It upholds liberal values limited only for men and women were excluded from the realm of liberation from the confinement of Victorian domestic wall. Her domesticity was of no use in the public sphere, and women were believed to lack the required masculine character and manly intelligence for handling public domain.

Ironically the Victorian feminist of 1830s and 1840s all circled back to the original sin of Victorian domestic ideology as it is said,

writers such as Sarah Lewis, Mrs. John Sanford, and best known of all, Sarah Ellis expounded at great length on the need for women simultaneously to accept their legal, social, and intellectual inferiority to men, while at the same time forming the moral characters of their children, making their homes the centre of improving discourse, and guiding husbands in their social, familial, and religious duties. (Caine, 1993, p. 44).

The moral responsibility of society fell spectacularly on women. It was women's duty to be morally pure, and the contact with the outer public world could have harmed their purity and therefore, needed to be secluded from the public world with the help of the bliss of domesticity and self-restraint, self-sacrifice, affection etc.

III. SOCIOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF SOCIALIST FEMINISM

'Socialist Feminism' was one of the prevailing feminist trends in the 1960s-70s that interlinks Marxist view of ramifications of Capitalist class structure and Radical Feminist view of Patriarchal Social structure being at the root of woman's oppression. De Leon, in his translator's preface to August Bebel' *Woman under Socialism* in 1903, bears out the fact that, "Woman Question is the weakest link" in the capitalist armor, "The shot that rips up the wrongs done to her [woman] touches a nerve that aches from end to end in the capitalist world" (Bebel, 1879/1917, p. iii).

Socialist Feminism appears to have breathed its first in Engel's historical book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1972). According to Engel the overthrow of the Matriarchal System by the Patriarchal System and accumulation of surplus production as a patriarchal private property to be inherited by their progeny left women only as an instrument of reproduction confined to the role of housekeeper and keeping her out of the process of public social production and thus out of power. In this way women became the first private servant economically subjugated to their master men. With the inception of the patriarchal system, the communal ownership went into the hands of men, which further divided into various classes like Capitalist and Working class, Bourgeois and proletariat class, Squires and Working farmers, etc.

The inequality of men and women before the law, which is a legacy of previous social conditions, is not the cause but the effect of the economic oppression of women. In the old communistic household, which embraced numerous couples and their children, the administration of the household, entrusted to the women, was just as much a public, a socially necessary industry as the providing of food by the men. This situation changed with the patriarchal family, and even more with the monogamian individual family. The administration of the household lost its public character. It was no longer the concern of society. It became a *private service*. The wife became the first domestic servant, pushed out of participation in social production. (Engels, 1972, p. 152)

According to Engels earlier, the whole society was pervaded by "primitive communism," and communal ownership of the production (Engels, 1972, p. 173). It was the period of matriarchy when all women had the power to the effect of important social, political, and economic decisions. It was a pre-class society. The concept of monogamous family was not prevalent "before class society; the idea of a strictly monogamous pairing of males and females with their offspring—the nuclear family—was unknown to human society. Inequality was also unknown. For more than 2 million years, humans lived in groups made up of people who were mostly related by blood, in conditions of relative equality" (Smith, 1997). Morgan describes three stages of development of the human race namely Savagery, Barbarism, and Civilization. With each move to the next stage, production increased. Thus the surplus production was appropriated by men, and the system of private property came into existence. The purpose of production that was for fulfilling the needs of the community was replaced by the purpose to accumulate wealth or profit. As a result, the class system was introduced with the class of the ruled and the ruler with ever-increasing social inequality and injustice. Gradually the matriarchal system was superseded by the

patriarchal system, and women became the first victim of the class/capitalist system:

The beginning of civilization is based on the supremacy of the man, the expressed purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father's property as his natural heirs. It is distinguished from pairing marriage by the much greater strength of the marriage tie, which can no longer be dissolved at either partner's wish. As a rule, it is now only the man who can dissolve it, and put away his wife. (Engels, 1972, p. 165)

Engel's anthropological description of human development clarifies that Capitalism and women's oppression came hand in hand. In the pre-class society or the age of Savagery and Barbarism, there was no demarcation of gender labour. Women, being in the centre of a matriarchal society, used to provide food to the community and used to control both productive and reproductive labour equally. But with the increase in the heavier agricultural fieldwork women were confined back to the four walls of the home. As the productive work increased, the need for more labour was increased too, which restricted women to the only substantial role in reproduction. Men seized the central position in the social production of more importance and women occupied a secondary role as unproductive. In consequence, a rigid sexual division of labour came into existence; women's unproductive labour in the household shifted power to men in sexual politics. Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Women's Oppression are woven together, leading to socialist feminism.

Engel stresses upon women's participation in social production and economic independence for their emancipation, abolishing the demarcation of public and private for gender labor. It is noteworthy that Elizabeth Gaskell strongly advocates participatory democracy of women in the public domain in her industrial novels like *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. Apart from Engels other socialist feminists like Charles Fourier also emphasizes women's public and social participation in production, "Social advances and changes of periods are brought about by virtue of the progress of women towards liberty, and the decadences of the social order are brought about by virtue of the decrease of liberty of women ... The extension of privileges to women is the general principle of all social progress" (Fourier, 1901, p. 77). The unpaid immaterial labor of women in the private sphere, which entails her economic dependence, forms a ground for her repression in terms of culture, ideology, and sexuality. As cultural, ideological and sexual norms are formulated by men and psychologically imbibed into women.

Zillah Eisenstein is also one of the socialist feminists whose "*Capitalist Patriarchy and the case for Socialist Feminism* (1979) is the first comprehensive representation of socialist feminist theory and analysis"

(Kennedy, 1980, p. 575). She has chosen the phrase 'Capitalist Patriarchy', to emphasize the existing mutual dependence, of the capitalist class structure and male supremacy; "understanding this 'interdependence' of patriarchy and capitalism is essential to the political analysis of Socialist Feminist" (Eisenstein, 1979, p. 1). Thus drawing on both capitalism and patriarchy, Eisenstein combines Radical Feminism and Marxist feminism. Michelle Barrett's *Capitalism and Women's Liberation* is another significant work with the thought for socialist feminism. Barrett has also delved into the question of the role of capitalism in women's oppression and denies the idea of women's liberation under capitalism. Barrett seems to be in accord with the slogan, "No women's liberation without socialism; no socialism without women's liberation" (Nicholson, 1997). In *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more Progressive Union* (1979) and *Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex* (1976), Heidi Hartmann holds a social structure based on capitalism responsible for exacerbating patriarchy. Hartmann also hints at the amalgamation of Radical Feminism and Marxist Feminism and seeks the cause of male power of domination in material basis. Hartmann maintains that, "this material basis should be conceived of as all forms of social structures that enable men to control women's labour- whether that be in the 'public' sphere of workplace or state, or the 'private' sphere of household" (Hartmann, 1979). Like Engels, Hartmann also holds monogamous heterosexual marriage and family responsible for developing patriarchy and capitalist social structure and considers labour demarcation as a strategy for women's oppression through economic dependence.

Apart from the influence of Radical Feminism and Marxist Feminism, another significant aspect of the Socialist Feminism was introduced by Juliet Mitchell by writing "Women: The Longest Revolution" (1966). According to Marysia Zalewski Mitchell's writings "alerted feminists to the need for a capitalist and psychic revolution" (2000, p. 18). This new psychoanalytical insight into women's condition explored new elements responsible for her oppression that how capitalist Victorian domestic ideology psychologically conditions the subjectivity of women. At the same time, with different subjectivity, the difference in thought process and moral bearings were also brought forth by Socialist Feminists.

Zalewski has termed the Feminist currents of the 1970s as Modernist Feminism and those of the 1990s as Postmodern Feminism. She puts Liberal, Radical, and Socialist Feminism under the head of Modernist Feminism. Post-modern Feminism is based on deconstruction and post-structural theories. In Post Modern Feminist era Socialist Feminism is criticized for neglecting the racial and other forms of oppression and instigates it to encompass and consider the other forms

of classifications like the issues of race and homosexuality. But it is noteworthy that despite the focus on the current contemporary issues like race and sexuality it is also the fact that society is still divided into classes, with the constant growth of capitalism somehow contributing to social inequality. "Class stratification is alive and well, as is the racial discrimination with which economic disparities are so regularly entwined" therefore to say that Socialist Feminism is redundant should be taken with a grain of salt (Zalewski, 2000, p. 22).

Victorian Feminism precedes Socialist Feminism; they differ from each other in a very fundamental principle of division of gender labour. Victorian feminists still adhered to the domestic sphere of women as opposed to the socialist feminist view of demolishing the demarcation of public and private labour. Socialist feminism posed a sharp contrast with Victorian Feminism by refuting the Victorian domestic ideology of patriarchal family and women's subordination to men. Like Radical feminism, it also differs from liberalism as it advocates only legal, political, and social rights digressing from the main object of women's sexual oppression. Elizabeth Gaskell, though she belonged to the Victorian Age, was far ahead of her contemporary Victorian feminists and her depiction of self-possessed, dynamic, and unconventional woman character presages a feminist age of self discovery with a new dimension of the socialist feminism of the 1960s and 1980s.

IV. SOCIALIST 'ELEGANT ECONOMY' OF CRANFORD

The unusual social setting of *Cranford* designed by the women gives another glimpse of the Socialist Feminist fabric of Gaskell's fiction. Cranford appears to be posed against an industrial region Drumble replicating Manchester. This economic, social, and cultural confrontation between Cranford and Drumble also draws in the issue of Gender and Class into its sphere. "The Elegant Economy" sans class exploitation invented by women in Cranford seems to be in accord with Marysia Zalewski's Socialist Feminist thought of women's different moral bearings (Gaskell, 1998, p. 3). Like in other novels, in *Cranford*, also Gaskell makes women stand out with different thinking, with an edge over that of men leading to bring about a new world with socialist values.

Ideas about 'differently gendered subjectivities' paved the way for some feminists to argue that women reasoned and thought differently to men...In the area of moral reasoning, for example, a particularly influential and contested book suggested that women and girls 'failed' on traditional scales of moral reasoning because such scales were based on boys and men (Gilligan, 1982). It was not Gilligan's intention to try and persuade others that women had the same moral reasoning power as men; rather she wanted to pursue the

idea that women had a different way of reasoning morally. (Caine, 1993)

A parallel confrontation is conspicuously observed in *Cranford* apart from that between socialist Cranford and capitalist Drumble viz a confrontation between patriarchal social structure conducive to capitalism and matriarchal social structure a step to socialism. Cranford’s socialist feminist side gets stronger with all the women having economic and political control as against “patriarchal property custom of the day” (Knezevic, 1998, p. 407). Cranfordian women’s world is very close to Engel’s Primitive Matriarchal Society devolving equal economic, political, and social power on women. And there was no concept of idle women as we find in the contemporary capitalist society, “The lady of civilization, surrounded by false homage and estranged from all real work, has an infinitely lower social position than the hard-working woman of barbarism, who was regarded among her people as a real lady (lady, frowa, Frau – mistress) and who was also a lady in character” (Engels, 1972, p. 142). Though Cranford is not altogether devoid of men but they are systematically driven to the peripheral of the social junction of the place imperative to overturn the gender hierarchy. It is noteworthy that these men find shelter in the neighbouring commercial town of Drumble, again hinting at the demarcation of the female values of socialism and male values of capitalism that is considered vulgar by Cranfordian Amazons.

Miss. Matty plays a crucial role as an agency to bring in a new social meaning in the system. She keeps aside her materialistic appetite for a silk gown to save a farmer from economic crisis when she exchanges five sovereigns for the fake note of Town and County Bank as she values a poor man’s sweat and little happiness. When Miss. Matty has to face a sudden bankruptcy; all the apprehensive Cranfordian Amazons come out with resources to pull her out of the financial collapse. Miss. Matty’s venture in the tea business brings forth new ethical values of mutual progress instead of individual profit in cutthroat competition of the capitalist world. When she comes to know about Mr. Johnson in the town who is already into this business, she gets concerned about him; “she had trotted down to his shop ... to tell him of the project that was entertained, and to inquire if it was likely to injure his business” (Gaskell, 1998, p. 275). The gentle gestures of Miss Matty in entreating her customers not to buy green tea as it has an effect of slow poison and her anguish on their pertinacity in buying it admonish selfish capitalist values. Through Women’s regime of social-system advocating social equality and social justice, reciprocation of mutual help on humanitarian ground, Miss. Matty’s concern over her customers’ welfare more than her own private profit, the ethical aspect of Business brought in by Ms. Matty dispel the capitalist social system based on class division and private profit

upheld by patriarchal social structures. Here Gaskell again relates the whole social structure with ‘Women Question’ and makes them inevitably interdependent; “Miss Matty simply supersedes the competitive business ethic with a cooperative social ethic that quite successfully manages social interaction among individuals and classes” (Langland, 1995, p. 124).

Poverty, the ugly picture of industrial capitalist Manchester, is excluded from the threshold of Cranford. Cranfordians even abhor talking about poverty; it is against their social decorum. The poor of Cranford lives with self-dignity and ‘aristocracy.’ The topics like money, commerce, trade, profit are avoided by them in contrast to money centered Society of Manchester. The concept of accumulating private property is overthrown by communal nature of economic activities.

A few of the gentlefolks of Cranford were poor, and had some difficulty in making both ends meet; but they were like the Spartans, and concealed their smart under a smiling face. We none of us spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic. The Cranfordians had that kindly *esprit de corps* which made them overlook all deficiencies in success when some of them tried to conceal their poverty. (Gaskell, 1998, p. 24)

The labour division between men and women was based on production and reproduction for to propagate inheritors of patriarchal private property. Only the role reserved for women was mothering children keeping out of the process of social production. In contrast to this, in Cranford, women are the proprietors of all the economic, political and social industry. Every activity of women is given social significance in constituting elegant economy. Ironically the girl child of Martha, the maidservant of Miss. Matty and Jem Hearn, is automatically and naturally amalgamated in Cranfordian women’s world. Jem’s role is only limited to the birth of the new member of Cranford with no other significance to his presence, “He, like the middle-class gentlemen of Cranford, conventionally disappears; his presence marked only by the daughter Martha bears to fill the arms of mistress” (Langland, 1995, p. 130). At the same time, Gaskell advocates mother-right which prevailed in the pre-class society of “primitive communism.” As Engel has described in his *Origin of Private Property, Family and State* (1972) that society’s conversion from matrilineal structure to the patrilineal structure was the root cause of class-based society, and the overthrow of mother-right was “the world historic defeat of the female sex” (Engels, 1972, p. 62).

The relation between middle-class women and their maids mocks the working-class slavery to capitalist masters. Gaskell draws a line of equality between Martha, Miss Matty’s Maidservant, and her mistress by switching their financial conditions and interdependence. But the mutual bond of love and care

of human relation negates the importance of financial differentiation. Martha rules out the probability of leaving her mistress, she hurries to get into wedlock with Jem Hearn in order to provide lodging to Miss Matty. A servant's daughter does not come with a tag of lower-class stigma and is naturalized into her mistress's 'god-daughter.' There is a mutual cooperation between the mistresses and their maidservants and they 'work side by side' with mutual empathy as we witness between the hostess and the servant both in Mrs. Forrester's party as the narrator says, "She knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 125). The class distinction is diluted altogether along with even an iota of exploitation as Elizabeth Langland (1995) says, "Class difference has all but disappeared from before our eyes" (p. 67).

The household management, the unproductive womanly works, making the best use of the smallest things like rose leaves to make 'pot-pourri' for a person who does not have a garden, making 'chary of candles,' have got social and public significance in *Cranford*. By shifting her focus to women values Gaskell has actually, as Elizabeth Langland says, corrected the 'fake truth' of the superiority of men's values ideologically and psychologically invigorated by patriarchal society. The values shaped by women bring in simplicity in every sphere of life, either economic or social; keeping early hours, rules of calling and visiting with the elegance of taciturnity, punctuality, expensive lifestyle and 'Money-spending' being considered as 'vulgar and ostentatious', love of peace and kindness, a life with a moderate means preferred and cherished puts *Cranford* in sharp contrast to materialist values of men. "The Conjunction of the ladies' fixed incomes –their lack of economic productivity-with their productivity of social meanings generates a different economy in *Cranford*, one they term 'elegant' in contrast to vulgar money – getting-and spending one" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 32).

As Engels described that with the advancement of agricultural production, the agricultural field grew more important than the household, and as the men became the centre of this new production field, the relation of men and women in the household also changed. The domestic labour and reproduction lost their social significance, and women became the personal service provider to men "A man engages in social production, and thereby serves society; a woman essentially serves her man. Since the majority of women are peripheral to public industry and objectively dependent, all women are stereotyped as secondary. All come to represent an undifferentiated domestic function as a sex" (Fraser, 2000, p. 256). *Cranford* overthrows this traditional ideological structure by restoring the production of social meanings and values inside the household governed by women; making the economy of the individual living household an ideal to be followed by the national economy. Gaskell's *Cranford* confirms the

principles of Engle's primitive society in which old ladies were given prime importance in making important social decisions. *Cranford*, as Langland says, "In its understanding of the ways in which women's discursive practices and their quotidian details constitute society and its meanings, it constructs another reality, another truth that counters that of women's marginality, passivity and dependence" (Langland, 1995, p. 131).

Although Gaskell does not intend to abolish "monogamous family" which, according to Engel, plays as the economic unit of society and the abolition of this is indispensable for the emancipation of women. But she presents a society devoid of families centered on private property, propagating a patriarchal social system of women's exploitation. "In *Cranford*, Gaskell offers a social model which operates under values which run counter to those of the capitalist patriarchy" (Colby, 1995, p. 56). Indeed *Cranford* entertains the values of socialist matriarchy where there is no biased distinction of economic class and gender class. 'Political economy of women's subordination' is replaced by the 'elegant economy' of liberation of humanity. This world brings out women with different subjectivity of their own reflected through their management of the social system of *Cranford*. This subjectivity is born out of their experiences of psychological and physical pangs of subordination to patriarchal domination, and so better understands the pertinent magnitude of socialist values.

The classless elegant social system of *Cranford* is a revolutionary socialist change. It presses upon the necessity of a socialist social structure, which according to Morgan, preceded class society; it will also consequently eradicate gender exploitation along with class exploitation. It is worth noting that more recent research has provided a plethora of examples that show that women enjoyed relative equality with men in pre-class societies. In these pre-class societies where the concept of private property was yet to be introduced, production was aimed for the social use in the required amount without the surplus to be distributed among classes. The necessities and needs were fulfilled with the exchange of goods as money was not in existence at that time. Childbearing and household work also acquired the significance of social and public industries. This kind of barter system in the interest of social good is nostalgically hinted at by Gaskell when people of *Cranford* exchange various things with Miss Matty to extend their appreciation and love for her humility, "A new economy of exchange emerges with Matty giving her patrons "good weight," while "they, in their turn brought many a little country present to the 'old rector's daughter-a cream cheese, a few new-laid eggs, a little fresh ripe fruit, a bunch of flowers; based less on money than on barter this new system pays tribute to the old" (Knezevic, 1998, p. 415). With the invention of money, as Engel says, a new social power came into existence; this power became a strong source of class

exploitation. The very things like money, creditors, debtors, usury, and forcible collection of debts are things of contempt for the Cranfordians.

V. CONCLUSION

The Socialist feminist approach in Gaskell's writings differs from contemporary radical and liberal feminist theories in its comprehensive study of women's oppression bringing in the other factors like class structure, psychology, subjectivity, and difference apart from biological and rational equality. Cranford advocates a social state of society with social equality and justice through the agency of women. This novel emphasizes "the fact of the excellence of women's values and abilities, the biological and evolutionary origin of women's superior attributes and socialist vision of political and social equality between the sexes" (Adams, 2002). All the questions and relations, whether social, economic, and political, are resolved keeping in view the social interest. According to Adam, it is not "capitalist competition and selfishness" but "cooperation is the means for the survival of the higher species" (2002). The narrator Miss Mary asserts at the end of the novel that, "ever since that day there has been the old friendly sociability in Cranford society; which I am thankful for, because of my dear Miss Matty's love of peace and kindness"(Gaskell, 1998, p. 270).

The whole story of women's oppression circles around Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Socialism and ultimately leads to Socialist Feminism. Women's oppression is somewhere linked to material gain. Gaskell's novels seek women's emancipation through socialism that rips –off the capitalist or class structure and thus the patriarchal system as the three are interlinked. Capitalism can be done away with only through bringing women-power to the fore which will upturn the relation of the ruler and the ruled. Gaskell makes it happen in her novel by advocating woman's 'participatory democracy,' eliminating gender-based demarcation of labour and imparting important roles to women in social production. *Cranford* is the best example showcasing the socialist social structure based on women's maternal, human and socialist values.

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