

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE VICTORIAN ERA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to highlight about the status of the women in the Victorian era in Literature. It includes social, economical and political position of the women in the nineteenth of the century in England, and the data of the reign of Queen Victoria. A good wife should always be ready to welcome a guest of any rank, join in conversations on various topics, and be a charming partner at various parties and banquets. The driving force behind all the successes of the Victorian era was undoubtedly the values and power of the middle class. Decisions regarding family members and large expenditures were made by the husbands, and the views of the wives were not always taken into account.

KEYWORDS: *Queen Victoria, Status Of Women, Social Life, Women In The Family.*

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian period refers to the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) of Great Britain, Ireland and India. This period of English history can be called the most developed and prosperous period of the empire. Queen Victoria was called the 'Grandmother of Europe' because the marriages of her children and grandchildren contributed to the expansion and strengthening of Britain's ties with other European countries, leading to the strengthening of Britain's power on the continent. Later, his generation ruled in many European countries [1]. Therefore, we will look at the characteristics of this period, especially the views on the status of women during the reign of Queen Victoria.

For a longer period of time than any other British monarch, during her 64-year reign, Queen Victoria became an example of her time and principles such as honesty, decency, hard work and greatness [1]. Throughout her life, the queen was subject to her family and her royal duty, which was very different from the lifestyle of previous rulers.

The majority of the upper class followed him, which led to the abandonment of the noisy, quarrelsome, restless lifestyle tradition of the previous generation of aristocrats. The highly skilled working class, like the aristocracy, decided to give up such a life. The driving force behind all the successes of the Victorian era was undoubtedly the values and power of the middle class. However, it cannot be said with certainty that all the features of the middle class were in an ideal state to follow it. Among the negative aspects of society, which were often ridiculed in the English literature of this period, were the belief in "prosperity is gratitude for goodness", strict

adherence to values established in family life, moral hypocrisy and guilt, and religious views in society. can be skipped [3]. The limitations of social life and the full observance of the rules did not imply open and vital human feelings. In the Victorian system, everyone was required to have a certain set of qualities required by society. Behavior, conversation, gestures, and etiquette were strictly controlled and violated. Artificiality and extreme moderation are therefore one of the main features of Victorian society. Consequently, hypocrisy was considered permissible, not mandatory. An educated person had to be polite to people he didn't like, not to express his opinion, to smile even when he wanted to cry. People around them needed to feel comfortable among other people, so they had to hide their feelings to provide them with the comfort they needed. It was only permissible to show one's true face by wearing a mask of hypocrisy in the family circle [1].

The pattern of family life introduced by the Royal Dynasty led to the strengthening of the sense of 'family worship' in Great Britain in the 19th century. It was the family that became the symbol of the Victorian era, and the large dynastic house included rules of conduct in society.

"How can I be happy? How can I be considered a tax collector? What can I do to make my life brighter?" - No woman has ever asked herself such questions before starting her daily routine. The qualities characteristic of the women of the period were consistent with other questions. "What can I do to make the most of my time, energy, and resources to make the most of it? Did I forget to help everyone in the house, and did that upset my loved ones? If nothing catches my attention, I, as a less busy member of the family, dedicate myself to the common good, engage them in friendly conversations, and cheer up those who are in a sad mood. I am ready" [4]. Sarah Ellis, in her *Women of England*, described the woman's position in the family roughly as follows. Praised by Sarah Ellis, "forgiving kindness" became the epitome of the perfect Victorian woman.

However, not all women have the title of the perfect woman. Historian Janet Horowitz has identified three main images of Victorian women [3]:

- 1) Perfect - a happy mother, a caring daughter, a good housewife;
- 2) Immoral - an inverted, courageous servant, a depraved woman, a "long-tongued" girl from the outskirts of the city;
- 3) The sufferer is a hungry, helpless weaver, a single mother.

No matter which of the above images the woman belonged to, she had to have her own point of view and interests in various matters of life, to be highly educated, or at least not to show it. However, in the Victorian era, girls' education was very serious. Unlike boys who were sent to schools and boarding schools, girls were educated in their own homes, under the strict supervision of their parents, by specially hired female educators and teachers. Girls were taught the same things as boys, but in addition, each girl was required to master foreign languages such as fine arts, music, and French, Italian, and German.

As for the appearance of Victorian women, it was dominated by strictness and various prohibitions. The woman's figure is hidden under the hem of the shirt: under the skirt there are several large rings made of wire, and the skirt itself is covered with a fabric of about ten meters. Later, the appearance of "tournaments" in the dress, decorated with various bands and other

ornaments, led to the complete closure of the lower part of the waist [3]. But there was not much determination to cover the neck and shoulders, and openness was allowed.

Having all of the above qualities was a guarantee for the girls to have a successful marriage in the future, to have children and to live a quiet family life. In Victorian times, marriage was considered the highest achievement in the life of every girl. The fact that married girls have to adhere to a system of moral conditioning can be considered a real achievement.

As mentioned above, the people of the time could not tolerate mental indifference, and physical openness was more strictly forbidden. The relationship between a man and a woman in the name of each other in public is also forbidden and condemned. Girls are not allowed to be alone with a man, meetings are open, conversations on worldly topics are held, symbolic gestures are used, "Can I hope?" and "Can I Think?" instead of a direct expression of love. The use of such expressions is strictly defined.

After the meetings and learning about each other's character and habits, the next stage of engagement awaited the lovers, allowing them to communicate more closely. During the engagement, the two parties would be able to get to know each other better, and the engagement would be canceled if any negative aspects of the character were identified. After long meetings and subsequent engagement, they finally got married [2]. However, during her family life, she was required to adhere more strictly to the strict rules that existed in her maiden life. For example, in the presence of strangers, the couple had to address each other as an official, i.e. a gentleman, "so that their chastity would not suffer from the couple's extreme intimacy".

The basic qualities of a good wife are humility, self-control, and self-sacrifice. These difficulties were mainly related to the complete submission of the head of the family to his husband. Accordingly, the order was also patriarchal, with society excluding women who had children but were not married because of different moral views. However, in many cases, married women were forced to endure domestic violence. Decisions regarding family members and large expenditures were made by the husbands, and the views of the wives were not always taken into account. But the reports of the chief servant, the gardener, or the cook were the focus of his attention. The men provided for their families and worked hard to improve their own and their family's social status. The reputation of the head of the family was unquestionable and undeniable, and even though the landlord's decisions were sometimes absurd and disastrous, none of the family members dared to challenge him. In order to protect their children, wives were not allowed to fight with their husbands, and the children were afraid of their fathers as much as they were afraid of fire [2]. Of course, women had the opportunity to choose a future spouse, although sometimes this was limited by the wishes of their parents and social norms. Ideally, marriage was viewed not as an agreement but as a union of people who would enrich each other spiritually throughout their lives.

In addition, all of a woman's property passed to her husband after the wedding, with the right to dispose of it, even if her husband died. Therefore, the sons of the aristocratic families who began to impoverish themselves married the daughters of wealthy businessmen in order to increase their status and enter previously inaccessible circles. The girls, on the other hand, accepted their offer in order not to be left unmarried or on the instructions of their parents. Characteristic women, on the other hand, consciously refused to marry because the unmarried woman was freer and could manage her property and savings as she wished. Famous women like Jane Austen,

Anne Bronte and Florence Nathanael are some of them. However, in order to have full freedom and independence, one had to earn some income. Poor unmarried women, on the other hand, had to choose one of the few women's professions or serve their wealthier relatives [3].

Married middle-class girls were exempted from housework. This fate rested on the shoulders of the servants, and their number was a sign of the family's position and wealth in society. The house was highly valued, reflecting not only wealth and material well-being, but also family peace and happiness. Therefore, when husbands were busy with their important work, their wives were only busy supervising the servants, taking care of their children, and ensuring that everything in the house was in order. A good wife should always be ready to welcome a guest of any rank, join in conversations on various topics, and be a charming partner at various parties and banquets. It is for women to organize parties and banquets, nature trips and meetings, as well as to go to the markets for shopping and gifts for all family members and servants, to visit sick relatives, to visit carpenters, to participate in charity events, to attend church prayers and of course to visit acquaintances, tasks were assigned [2].

But in reality, despite spending most of their time at home, women and their daughters spent most of their time idle. After finishing all their street work, the women would stay at home for their husband's return and dedicate the rest of their time to him and their children. The custom of drinking tea at five o'clock in the evening was a tradition all over England, except for poor families. In the evening, the whole family gathered around the table. In well-to-do families, someone was often invited, and the choice of guests was left to the wives. The host was at the table, his wife was sitting across from him, and the children and guests were sitting to the right and left. After dinner, everyone would gather together, read a book, play a variety of games, and discuss the important events of the previous day. Entertainment such as listening to music, singing, and home theater are also noteworthy [2].

Thus, the status of women in the Victorian era was not worth envying, even if it meant a certain material, spiritual, and family stability.

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