

## Chapter 2

### Formation of Heteronormativity in Nineteenth Century Britain

#### **2.0. Introduction**

The Victorian age in Great Britain renders a paradigmatic shift in terms of its endeavour in the formation of the codes of sexuality and the preferences associated with them. The transformation of capitalism into imperialism, as Lenin has observed in his *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline* (1917) requires concentration of monopoly market and rapid growth in production (14). Such desired boom in production, in turn, depends on uninterrupted supply of raw materials and availability of cheap yet efficient labour force. Political economy was therefore necessary to monitor and regulate the human resource indispensable for production.

The regulation of sexuality thus became crucial to accomplish the task bestowed by the monopoly market. Victorian society had taken up the responsibility to structure and discipline sexuality as part of the process to revise the notion of family and human relationships. Such structural endeavour entails codification of sexual behaviour and norms necessary for procreation as well as careful elimination of acts and preferences indulged in for the sake of bodily pleasure. The formation of Victorian standardized codes of sexuality therefore depended on observation, stipulation, surveillance and elimination conducted and monitored by the state itself. Such institutionalization of sexuality not only constricted the arena of sexuality itself, but also formed the specifications required to perform gender roles. In this chapter, I shall try to examine the nuances of Victorian standardization of sexuality and the process of its transformation into the system of heteronormativity.

#### **2.1. The Economic Context of The Regulation of Sexuality**

The end of the nineteenth century had experienced the rapid growth of monopoly in the Capitalist system. This was combined with an aggressive imperial policy of acquisition of absolute control over market and economy as a whole. Such policy requires the extension of control over the social and political institutions as well.

In *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline*, Vladimir Lenin had observed:

A financial oligarchy, which throws a close network of dependence relationships over all the economic and political institutions of present-day bourgeois society without exception—such is the most striking manifestation of this monopoly. (92)

The gradual development of the network between economic, social and political institutions resulted in the effort to monitor and regulate the growth and distribution of population, an essential component for the easy functioning of production and proliferation of finance capital<sup>1</sup>. In his 1798 treatise on population, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers* (1798) Thomas Malthus stresses on the need to regulate the growth of population by monitoring the shifts in the nature of the passion of the sexes and their participation in the institution of marriage and the formation of family. In his discussion of marriage (essentially heterosexual), Malthus offers a critique of various sections of the British society for their rigid and conservative notions about marriage and advocates flexibility by virtue of abolition of all hindrances to marriage and formation of family in order to systematically proliferate the growth of population (17-21). According to Malthus:

If this sketch of the state of society in England be near the truth, and I do not conceive that it is exaggerated, it will be allowed that the preventive check to population in this country operates, though with varied force, through all the classes of the community [...] The effects, indeed, of these restraints upon marriage are but too conspicuous in the consequent vices that are produced in almost every part of the world, vices that are continually involving both sexes in inextricable unhappiness. (21-22)

Such observation renders the endeavour of capitalism to systematize norms and customs concerning marriage. In fact, capitalism as a socio-economic system has conceived marriage as the celebration of heterosexual monogamy indispensable to carry on the serious business of legitimate and well-regulated reproduction to construct a potentially trained and intelligent labour force in order to propel the growth and standard of production in a budding industrial capitalism flourishing in the eighteenth century. In fact, eighteenth century capitalism in Britain applied twofold strategies to ensure economic and industrial growth. For the leadership and the

strategic part, it depended upon the trained labour force originated in England, while for physical labour; it relied upon the import of slaves as the cheapest labour force from colonies.

The import of the slaves from colonies had been reduced largely because of the increased automation of the industries by the end of the nineteenth century. Instead of the colonized slaves, Britain acquired a trained labour force consisting of its own population in the middle of the nineteenth century. For maintenance and sustenance of this trained labour force, the consistent supply was indispensable and so was the formation of domestic, conjugal and behavioural norms.

In the eighteenth century, the norms of sexuality appeared to be flexible and less controlled compared to the nineteenth century because Capitalism was not developed fully. The concepts of obscenity, coarseness, vulgarity did not feature in the realm of sexuality in a rigid manner. This is perhaps because of the lack of consolidation of the bourgeoisie that was still struggling with feudal monarchy over political power and control over the production. The series of civil wars made Europe a zone of conflict and disorder. Feudalism appeared to be lenient in the matter of sexuality because the production system was not much developed and did not require expansion. However, with the emergence of a consolidated bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, the production system needed to be systematized and developed in order to move beyond the limits of agrarian economy.

The newly emerged bourgeoisie, therefore, put all efforts to set up a disciplined and advanced production system, based on industry and automation. As part of this endeavour, it became crucial to systematize family as a key social institution to ensure an uninterrupted supply of a trained labour force. Moreover, the family, an institution primarily based on monogamy, appears to be crucial to protect the rights of inheritance and protection of wealth, an essential condition for monopoly capitalism to expand and flourish. Marriage appears to be the key instrument to protect these rights. In the nineteenth century, marriage and monogamy became the sacred rites of the bourgeoisie to sustain their social control and power. In his *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Engels observes:

Monogamy arose from the concentration of considerable wealth in the hands of a single individual man – and from the need to bequeath this wealth to the children of that man and of no other. (40)

## **2.2. Consolidation of Sexuality in the Victorian Period**

Marriage as an institution, therefore, ensures monogamy for women and men on the one hand, while it reduces the anxiety of inheritance and succession on the other. Hence, the social need was to establish marriage as a compulsory social duty and as part of that, to designate monogamy as the only way to channelize one's sexual desire. The nineteenth century bourgeoisie in Britain designated married couples as the sole proprietor of sexuality. Along with it, heterosexual monogamy has been codified as the legitimate form of sexuality. As Michel Foucault notes in his *The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume I*:

Sexuality was carefully confined [...] The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction [...] The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm [...] A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space [...] but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parent's bedroom. (3)

The confinement of sexuality within the bedroom of the heterosexual married couple and the establishment of essential utilitarian relationship between sexuality and procreation resulted in suppression, constriction and elimination of sexual desires and preferences. The bedroom of the married couple became one of the metaphorical production units producing cheap labour force required in a capitalist system of production. The sexuality in the Victorian period, as I infer, appears to have dwelled more on restrictions than allowances. The strategies of suppression consist of surveillance, institutional espionage; medical diagnosis and treatment while those of elimination comprise codification of obscenity, vulgarity, coarseness and their subsequent censorship as well as prosecution of the offenders and careful scrutiny of the potential offenders.

### **2.2.1. Victorian Legal Discourse Concerning Sexual Conduct in Academic Institutions**

The strategy of surveillance operates in multifarious ways in social space. The boarding school, prison house, academic institution and ecclesiastical society had been identified as the potential spaces vulnerable to aberrations of sexual codes modified by Victorian society by virtue of their capacity of the assemblage and amalgamation of sexually active teens and adults.

The identification followed formation of the codes of conduct and monitoring of their execution. The *Clarendon Report: Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Revenues and Management of Certain Colleges and Schools, and the Studies Pursued and Instruction Given Therein Volume I* (1864), presented to the British parliament, has considered elementary schools as training centres of moral duties, responsibilities and codes of conduct and proposed various reformist measures to enhance the moral standards of the pupils. Such measures comprise rigorous physical training and sports such as swimming, shooting, and drill to do away with indolence and unruly behaviour.<sup>33</sup>

The playfields of cricket and football were seen not merely as spaces of amusement, but as the training centres of masculinity and behavioural codes.<sup>34</sup> The report stressed on the need of developing disciplines and manliness, as essential requirements of education for boys. While the surveillance was primarily on the acquisition of manliness, the vulnerability of the same-sex correspondence towards aberrant sexual practices such as homosexuality, masturbation etc. have been tacitly acknowledged and implicated. An intriguing section of the Report, as I find, is the section on “fagging” (*Clarendon Report* 42)

“Fagging” (*Clarendon Report* 42) implies duties and services, provided by younger students to their seniors. Although these services primarily consist of duties on the playing field, physical training assistance and participation in the arrangements of sports activities, the Report recommends some of these services to be performed by the servants instead of the fags. As the *Clarendon Report: Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Revenues and Management of Certain Colleges and Schools, and the Studies Pursued and Instruction Given Therein Volume I* (1864) states:

The relation of master and fag is generally friendly, and to a certain though perhaps a slight extent one of patronage and protection, and it sometimes gives rise to lasting intimacies. (44)

It is curious to note that in spite of its acknowledgement of the practice as friendly, the *Clarendon Report: Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners appointed to inquire into the*

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<sup>33</sup> See page 41, <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/clarendon1864/clarendon1.html#P1>. Accessed 5 December 2022.

<sup>34</sup> See page 41 of the Clarendon report, 1864. ‘The cricket and football fields, however, are not merely places of exercise and amusement; they help to form some of the most valuable social qualities and manly virtues, and they hold, like the classroom and the boarding-house, a distinct and important place in public-school education.’

*Revenues and Management of Certain Colleges and Schools, and the Studies Pursued and Instruction Given Therein Volume I* (1864) recommends to reduce the burden of the fags. An anticipation of the “lasting intimacies” (44) beyond the school may be considered a reason behind such a proposal as the practice might cause “bodily ill-usage” (43) and therefore, “injurious to character” (43).

Boys, as future disciplined labour force, has to be protected from all vulnerability to involvement in ‘aberrant’ practices. In her study of the male homosocial desire, *Between Men: English literature and male homosocial desire* (1985), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to the homosocial bonding between men and young boys in terms of the service, which essentially include sexual pleasure, provided by the latter to the former in ancient Athenian society (4). The distinction between the homosocial and the homosexual is always at the threat of blurring at the boy’s hostel or in the cloakroom of the gymnasium. In *The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume I* Michel Foucault observes the growing prohibition and surveillance on the sexuality of children in the nineteenth century as part of the mechanism of the power structure of Victorian regimentation of sexuality.<sup>35</sup> According to Foucault in *The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume I*:

The sex of children and adolescents has become, since the eighteenth century, an important area of contention around which innumerable institutional devices and discursive strategies have been deployed. (30)

### **2.2.2. Victorian Penal Code and Prison House**

The prison house has also been identified as vulnerable to forbidden sexual practices such as sodomy. Young convicts and lads were involved, often forcibly and consensually, into the sexual acts with older men. In a letter written to Britain’s senior prison administrator Edmund Du Cane, the penal reformer William Tallack warned about the “unnatural crime” (Bethell)<sup>36</sup> committed by male convicts in prisons. He also refers that the prison warders “jocularly called certain convicts by female names as having been the objects of unnatural crime.”

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<sup>35</sup> For an elaborate discussion, see *History of Sexuality Volume I*, page 41-42.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Ben Bethell. Prison Sex in the Mid-Victorian English Convict System. <https://notchesblog.com/2016/09/06/prison-sex-in-the-mid-victorian-english-convict-system/>. Accessed 9 December 2022.

(Bethell)<sup>37</sup> Such offences had been considered as an obnoxious criminal act and was subjected to capital punishment until 1861. After that, the penalty for any indecent assault or attempted sodomy had been reduced to imprisonment for life in maximum and ten years of penal servitude in minimum.

The prison administration often appeared to be confused regarding the men convicted for sodomy or sexual assault with men. They had initially been transported to colonies such as Australia and Gibraltar, but the process was terminated due to series of objections from the colonial authorities. The concern for male prisoners with aberrant sexualities was part of surveillance strategies of Victorian state and prison was essentially one of the centres of high alert. The prison appears to be a segregated space divided into equal segments where every individual movement, action and response of the inmates are carefully monitored in relation with the data preserved by permanent registration. In his discussion of Panopticism in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage Books: 1995), Michel Foucault commented:

The Panopticon was also a laboratory; it could be used as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals. To experiment with medicines and monitor their effects. To try out different punishments on prisoners, according to their crimes and character, and to seek the most effective ones. To teach different technique simultaneously to the workers, to decide which is the best. (203-204)

The different strategies employed by the prison administration to deal with the convicts with ‘unnatural’ sexual desires show their primary bafflement concerning the way to discipline the unruly individuals. The strategies comprise rigorous oppression, isolation and finally, elimination. The act of sodomy was often equated with bestiality in its imitation of animal gesture<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, this act has been conceived as an insensible, gross physical, devoid of emotion and therefore, a prerogative of the lower class.

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Ben Bethell. Prison Sex in the Mid-Victorian English Convict System. <https://notchesblog.com/2016/09/06/prison-sex-in-the-mid-victorian-english-convict-system/>. Accessed 9 December 2022.

<sup>38</sup> The posture during the sexual intercourse replicates the animals have sex with each other.

In response to the act of sodomy allegedly committed by Oscar Wilde, Henry James designated Wilde as an “unclean beast” (Bethell).<sup>39</sup> Hence, the administration held the offenders prosecuted for sodomy with aversion and contempt. In 1533, during the reign of King Henry VIII, the prosecution for the act of sodomy was shifted from the ecclesiastical court to the administrative court. *The Buggery Act of 1533* held sodomy as a high offence that amounts to capital punishment. The act conceives sodomy as a “detestable and abominable vice”<sup>40</sup> and interestingly enough, instead of limiting it within the purview of sex between men, penalty for sodomy had been extended to sex with woman and beast.<sup>41</sup>

The capital punishment for sodomy remained in Britain until 1861. In 1885, the British parliament passed an amendment to ban same-sex relationship between men as offensive. The lesbian relationship, however, seems to have remained outside the purview of the legal prosecution because it appeared to be unimaginable to the legislators (I did not come across any legal provision convicting lesbians). The liberal Member of British Parliament from Northampton Henry Du Pre’ Labouchere proposed the *Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885*, which was primarily meant for protection of the rights of women and girls and suppression of brothels. However, in Section 11 of the Act, the penalty on homosexuality was further reiterated.

The Part I, Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 clearly states that:

Any *male*<sup>42</sup> person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and being convicted thereof shall be liable at the discretion of the court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Ben Bethell. Prison Sex in the Mid-Victorian English Convict System. <https://notchesblog.com/2016/09/06/prison-sex-in-the-mid-victorian-english-convict-system/>. Accessed 9 December 2022.

<sup>40</sup> See the transcript of the Buggery Act 1533. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-buggery-act-1533>. Accessed on 12 December 12, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> For the relevant section, see transcript of the Buggery Act 1533 on <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-buggery-act-1533>. Accessed 9 December 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Italics mine. The stress on male suggests the increasing reported cases of male homosexuality in that period.

<sup>43</sup> See Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885. <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1885/act/69/enacted/en/print>. Accessed 9 December 2022.



This section, which designates homosexuality as a punishable offence, has interestingly brought under its purview, not only the sexual behaviour of man in the public domain, but extended it to the private domain. In 1895, Oscar Wilde was charged with sodomy by John Sholto Douglas, ninth Marquis of Queensberry and the father of his former lover Lord Arthur Douglas and booked under this Act. Such an attempt appears to be regressive in its breach of individual privacy. However, as I see, this policing of sex was done perhaps not because homosexuality was a taboo, but for regulation of sex, necessary for population management and control. Apparently, I feel, this breach of privacy seems to be a compromise with the individualism hailed by the bourgeoisie. However, as I feel, in a capitalist social framework, the rights of the individual is subjugated to the requirements of production and the flow of capital.

### **2.2.3. Victorian Medical Discourse Concerning Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Fertility**

It is interesting to note that the control over sexuality extended by the Victorian state was not only limited to suppression and elimination of aberrant sexual desires and practices, but also more effectively exercised by the strategy of regulation by surveillance, apparently designated as ‘care’. According to Michel Foucault in *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, nineteenth century Britain witnessed the emergence of a whole body of medical discourses concerning the diagnosis, treatment, and care and monitoring of the people with “unnatural” sexual preferences and transgressive intent. Foucault designates it as “medicalization of the sexuality” (44).

I conceive that *The Contagious Disease Acts* of 1864, 1866 and 1869, apparently meant to control sex work, has constructed the body of woman as a site of surveillance and scrutiny through a body of legal and medical discourses. The Acts were brought into legislation in order to restrain the rapid increase in venereal diseases among the members of the British army. The Act of 1864 implicates that the British Government had taken the voluntary remedy to identify, admit and treat ‘the prostitutes’, as said in the text, carrying venereal diseases.<sup>44</sup> However, in most cases, the sex workers, were reluctant to be admitted to hospital and remain there until

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<sup>44</sup> Similar acts were also implemented in the then British colonies like India. For a detailed discussion, please see Chapter III of this dissertation.

they were completely cured. Hence, the government considered it necessary to introduce these Acts.<sup>45</sup>

What appears to be curious is the endeavour to categorize and define ‘prostitution’<sup>46</sup>. According to the Royal Commission, 1871, one’s own admission of involvement in ‘prostitution’, residence in a brothel, habitual association and company with other sex workers, public solicitation in the streets and most importantly, allegations made by army personnel about being infected by that a woman, who would be identified as a common ‘prostitute’.<sup>47</sup> Hence, I think that the identification of a sex worker depended on the statement of a male person.

The Contagious Diseases Acts, by virtue of their acknowledgement of women as the sole carrier of diseases, seem to demonstrate the patriarchal prejudices of the Victorian society. The women were held solely responsible for the spread of venereal diseases and the provision was made to do the health check-up of the prostitutes once in three months.

The male carriers of venereal diseases were, however, exempted from such medical examinations. In the army, consistent check-ups initially began, but later discouraged because the government feared a weakening of the self-esteem of army men. Prostitutes were forced to be confined within hospitals for treatment of venereal diseases. Such hospitals were notoriously called the ‘Lock hospital’. They were released only after an official self-declaration that they are no longer ‘prostitutes’ (Baker 91-96). In her discussion on Contagious Diseases Act 1864 and sex work, “The Contagious Diseases Acts and the Prostitutes: How Disease and the Law Controlled the Female Body” (*UCLJLJ*, 1, 1: 2011), Kimeya Baker states:

According to the Act, any woman could be charged with prostitution upon the testimony of a police inspector, superintendent, or medical examiner before a magistrate. The burden of proof was on the woman to convince the courts that she was not a prostitute.

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<sup>45</sup> See Baker 91-96.

<sup>46</sup> The etymology of the word suggests “harlot, woman who offers her body indiscriminately” (usually for money), 1610s, from Latin *prostituta* “prostitute,” fem. of *prostitutus* “exposed publicly,” adjectival use of past participle of *prostituere* “expose to prostitution; expose publicly”.... The notion of “sex for hire” is not inherent in the etymology, which rather suggests one “exposed to lust” (by herself or another) or sex “indiscriminately offered.” Harper, Douglas. “Etymology of prostitute.” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/prostitute>. Accessed 4 December, 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Referred by C. W. Shirley De Akin. “The Contagious Diseases Acts : the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864, ’66, ’68 (Ireland), ’69, from a sanitary and economic point of view : being a paper read before the Medical Society of University College, London, on Thursday, November 30th, 1871”. [https://archive.org/stream/b22298423/b22298423\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/b22298423/b22298423_djvu.txt). Accessed 4 December 2022.

If she failed to do so, she was forced to undergo a mandatory vaginal examination by an army surgeon. (92)

The specifications to identify a prostitute demonstrate the strategies of the Victorian state to take control of the female body under the aegis of medical discourse. The army surgeon, who examined the body of the sex workers in hospitals, were male surgeons. Hence, body of the female patient was subjected to male gaze. The medical examination of the female body demonstrates the operation of moral imperative, as Foucault has observed, “under the guise of the medical norm” (*The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume 1*, 53). Hence, in the Victorian society, scientific and medical discourses concerning aberrant and perverted forms of sexuality act as the instruments of exertion of the power of the state.

The laws concerning sanitation and public health, far from functioning as benevolent for social health, generated anxiety and fear about sexuality. Such rigorous clinical scrutiny ironically establishes the exertion of control over the working class by the elites. The obsession with sexual health of female sex workers also manifests Victorian preoccupation with the notion of chastity. An obsession with the notion of chastity, as I think, emanate from the imperialist concern of the purity of blood and at the same time, that of the prevention of sexual anarchy to secure the process of reproduction within the institutions of heterosexual marriage and the family. The medical examination of the genitalia of the sex worker displays moral rather than medical intent. Such acts often amount to sexual molestation.

As a result, these laws began to receive opposition from Feminist activists such as Josephine Butler and even from the quarters of medical science. Josephine Butler’s Ladies National Association raises questions over the victimization of women as sexual predators and tempters while allowing exemption to the males (Baker 94-95). Although, united protests by the opposition from various quarters led to repeal of the Acts in 1886, the perception about women as the guarder of morality and culture persisted in Victorian society. The ideas of desire, pleasure and satisfaction in sexuality were carefully kept aside from the purview of female sexuality. In his book *Sexuality* (Routledge: 2007), Joseph Bristow says that:

During the nineteenth century, European and American cultures insisted on dividing femininity into angelic and demonic, virtuous and vicious types – implying, at all times, that these apparently opposite poles of good and bad women were in some respects independent. (42)

Such categorization, as I think, leads to the assumption of all women as the perpetrators of immorality and men are projected as vulnerable and helpless prey to ‘devouring female sexuality’. The association of transgressive female sexuality<sup>48</sup> with demonic traits led to the efforts to ‘redeem’ it with religious penance in fiction, and legal prosecution in real-life practices, and even eliminate it with brutal force if it went too far. The fictional social narratives of the Victorian age, as I perceive, preferred the legal prosecution while gothic, vampiric and crime fiction chose the religious penance. However, the duality between motherhood and fallen woman concerning female sexuality seems to dominate the Victorian scene, which gave rise to contradictory, yet striking discourse.

In the essay “The Development of Muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and Beyond” (*Journal of Religion and Society*, 7: 2005), Nick J Watson, Stuart Weir and Stephen Friend see the emergence of “muscular Christianity in the second half of the nineteenth century” (1). According to them, Christian masculinity became part of school curriculum with an insistence on sports and exercises to develop manliness among boys. Such insistence on developing manliness springs from the idea of virtue and morality associated with masculinity. This idea became immensely popular because of its relation with Victorian obsession with physical health (Watson et al.7). However, this concept appears to be hypocritical, because, I think that men are allowed license and privilege in sexuality, and virtue and morality are taught to men with a pinch of salt.

The strategy of Victorian determination of ideal sexual behaviour and sexuality entails codification of obscenity and the subsequent censorship to forbid them. The policy of censorship seemed to have come into force in the domain of ‘aberrant’ sexual behaviour such as homosexual acts, sodomy, bestiality, necrophilia; the post-sexual encounter consequences such as abortion, birth control, motherhood and finally, in literary and visual representation of sexuality in art. Such an endeavour was undoubtedly propelled by the project of population control. In his *The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Michel Foucault states:

(It) was necessary to analyse the birth-rate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making

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<sup>48</sup> By transgressive female sexuality as per the standard Victorian norms, I mean the sexual advancement made by women and their non-conformity with the institution of marriage, conjugal life and motherhood. The transgressive females, according to the Victorian norms of sexuality, are sexually active, promiscuous and therefore, appear to be incongruous with the ideal image of a woman as a pious, chaste and submissive individual.

them fertile or sterile, the effects of unmarried life or of the prohibitions, the impact of contraceptive practices [...] (25-26)

The formation and implementation of the policies concerning sexuality has engineered a paradigmatic shift in the idea of sexuality itself. From the subject of romantic idolatry and elitist fascination, sex has entered into the serious arena of scientific discourse. The theory of John Malthus was instrumental in formulating a policy for population control.<sup>49</sup> However, Malthus, in spite of his insistence on population control as an essential prerequisite of economic development, was not in favour of artificial birth control. This view was in parity with the moral prejudices of the Victorians who believe in restraint of desire rather than in artificial management.

However, the idea of artificial birth control emerged with activists with Feminist leanings and met severe oppositions from the conservative camp. In her essay “Law, Literature, and Libel: Victorian Censorship of 'Dirty Filthy' Books on Birth Control” (*William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, 10, 3: 2004) Kristin Brandser Kalsem has presented case studies on the three Victorian advocates of birth control: Annie Besant, Jane Hume Clapperton and Mary Stopes.

According to Kristin Brandser Kalsem:

Besant, Clapperton, and Stopes directly addressed the issue of the regulation of women's bodies through the legal and cultural censorship of information on birth control. In doing so, they changed the course of history. (537)

In 1877, Annie Besant and her companion Charles Bradlaugh edited and published a pamphlet on birth control, entitled *Fruits of Philosophy: A Treatise on the Population Question* (1877), written by Charles Knowlton and were immediately placed under trial for promoting unnatural desires, obscenity and debauchery. In the Publishers' Preface of *Fruits of Philosophy: A Treatise on the Population Question* Besant and Bradlaugh state:

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<sup>49</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Kristin Brandser Kalsem. ‘Law, Literature, and Libel: Victorian Censorship of 'Dirty Filthy' Books on Birth Control’. 10 *William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law* 533 (2004). 537-540. <http://www.law.uc.edu/facpapers/index.html>. Accessed 9 December 2022.

We think it more moral to prevent the conception of children than, after they are born, to murder them by want of food, air and clothing. We advocate scientific checks to population, because, so long as poor men have large families, pauperism is a necessity, and from pauperism grow crime and disease [...] we consider it a crime to bring into the world human beings doomed to misery or to premature death.<sup>50</sup>

I find it interesting to note that the Besant and Bradlaugh presented the issue from the point of view of Malthus, but refused to put the onus of responsibility of overpopulation on the working class only. In their reference to low wages paid to the labourers, infanticide and high infant mortality rate among the working classes, they reminded the Government of its social duties and the necessity to introduce welfare schemes for the working classes along with scientific methods of birth control. The socialist overtones in the argument are unmistakable.

In his discussion on industrial proletariat in cities in *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (1845), Engels has made the following observation:

He (industrial proletariat) knows that every breeze that blows, every whim of his employer, every bad turn of trade may hurl him back into the fierce whirlpool from which he has temporarily saved himself, and in which it is hard and often impossible to keep his head above water. He knows that, though he may have the means of living today, it is very uncertain whether he shall tomorrow. (45)

The Victorian bourgeoisie, however, preferred to pay a deaf ear to such an outcry of the Socialists and the Feminists. Instead, they had undertaken the policy of repression by bringing morality into the issue of birth control. Such a strategy served dual purposes of population control and avoidance of responsibility of the administration, which saves a lot of expenditure. Hence, I feel, the moral prejudices of Victorian society concerning artificial birth control is only a façade to keep the balance sheet perfect and healthy. The moralistic sermons seem to be partially governed by the sheer economic networks of sexuality.

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<sup>50</sup> Knowlton, Charles. *Fruits of Philosophy: A Treatise on the Population Question*. Edited by Anne Besant and Charles Bradlaugh, 1877. E-book. [www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/38185/pg38185-images.html#link2H\\_4\\_0001](http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/38185/pg38185-images.html#link2H_4_0001). Accessed 4 December 2022. Page numbers are not given in the eBook of the text consulted.

#### 2.2.4. Birth Control and Conjugal Happiness

In her 1885 treatise entitled *Scientific Meliorism and the Evolution of Happiness*, Jane Hume Clapperton put forward her socialist agenda concerning population and birth control. In this treatise, she compared the working classes of the country with “patients” (29). Her ideals resemble classical Marxist idea of the condition of the working classes and following Besant, she advocates the responsibility of the state to ensure happiness in the life of the working classes.

The efforts of Besant and Bradlaugh as well as Clapperton paved way for the scientific doctrines on artificial birth control and their applications by the female doctor Marie Carmichael Stopes. She, along with her husband, not only opened the first birth control clinic in Britain at Holloway, North London in 1921, but also published her treatise on birth control and conjugal relationship, *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties* in 1918. This treatise appears to be a practical handbook of married couples to have a mutually contented love life. This book dedicated to all husbands and betrothed in love, attempted to move sexuality out of the utilitarian network of Victorian political economy<sup>51</sup>. Moreover, in spite of its tacit acknowledgement of heterosexual love between a married couple as a superior form of love, a reiteration of Victorian formation of sexuality, she insisted on the acquisition of sexual pleasure of women as an essential component of conjugal love.

In the chapter entitled “Modesty and Romance” (Stopes 66), Stopes states that:

(One) of the innumerable sweet impulses of love should be to reveal, each to each, this treasure of living beauty. To give each other the right to enter and enjoy the sight which most of all sights in the world draws and satisfies the artist’s eyes. (67)

Stope’s insistence on the right time of contraception renders prioritization of pleasure in marital love. In the chapter entitled “Children” (Stopes 77), she has stated that:

Not only for the sake of the child, however, should the first conception be a little delayed, but also to secure the lasting happiness of the married lovers. It is generally (though

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<sup>51</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica defines political economy as ‘a branch of social science that studies the relationships between individuals and society and between markets and the state, using a diverse set of tools and methods drawn largely from economics, political science, and sociology’. Balaam, David N. and Veseth, Michael A.. "political economy". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 23 Jan. 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-economy>. Accessed 4 December 2022.

perhaps not always) wise thoroughly to establish their relation to each other before introducing the inevitable dislocation and readjustment necessitated by the wife's pregnancy and the birth of a child. (81)

In spite of her patriarchal leanings in prioritization of the preferences of the husband, Stope's acknowledgement of the pleasure principles in sex is undoubtedly a step forward from Victorian utilitarianism.

### **2.3. Literary Censorship in the Victorian Period**

The literary censorship tightened its grip on Victorian society with the enforcement of Obscene Publications Act 1857. This Act, also known as Lord Campbell's Act made the sale and distribution of obscene material a statutory offence. The Act has conferred special power to the Magistrate even to break open (if necessary) the door of any shop, house or warehouse in order to seize "Obscene Books, Papers, Writings, Prints, Pictures, Drawings, or other Representations"<sup>52</sup> upon complaint received by him within his area of jurisdiction. What appears to be significant is the extent of the enforcement of power to suppress any material, which does not corroborate with Victorian moral and political standards. Moreover, the publication houses played a crucial role to succeed the policy of censorship. Most of the eminent Victorian novelists such as Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Emily Bronte, Thomas Hardy and many others had to face difficulties for dealing with subjects such as love, seduction, sexual assault, homosexuality, lesbianism and even violence upon working classes in the industrial sector.

The locus of Victorian censorship was on the idea of woman as essentially chaste and virtuous. The Victorian morality put the onus on men, working class women and sex workers as far as passion is concerned. The women, apart from those mentioned previously, are supposed to devote all their passion solely to motherhood. Sexual pleasure becomes the prerogative of males and the women who succumb to the temptation of sexual passion, have been degenerated to debauchery and compelled to face severe punishment and penance to get redemption.

In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), or Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862), virtuous women Mary Barton and Lizzie redeem the fallen women Esther and Laura

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<sup>52</sup> For a detailed version, please see The Statutes Project. <https://statutes.org.uk/site/the-statutes/nineteenth-century/1857-20-21-victoria-c-83-obscene-publications-act/>. Accessed on 5 December 2022.



respectively following pain and penance. The choice of the virtuous women as redeemers renders the idea that immunity to sexual passion is the ideal to be followed. In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Catherine has to die a premature death for her involvement with Heathcliff in a relationship characterized by stormy passion, while her daughter, a more sophisticated Victorian woman is rewarded with a successful marriage and lasting happiness at the end of the novel.

Thomas Hardy had to face severe social criticism and censorship from readers and publishers for his novels *Tess of the D'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) so much so that he finally resorted to poetry, discarding the novel altogether. The subtitle of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), "A Pure Woman" generated a furore in literary quarters (Litwin 1). The controversy concerning the novel centres on its reference to rape and sexual assault on Tess, the female protagonist and Hardy's designation of her as a "Pure Woman" and license to live her life in spite of being a rape survivor with a child. In his validation of the subtitle, Hardy said:

I still maintain that her innate purity remained intact to the very last; though I frankly own that a certain outward purity left her on her last fall. I regarded her as being in the hands of circumstances, not morally responsible, a mere corpse drifting with the current to her end. (Quoted in Jose 12)

The explanation was, however, necessary to avoid controversy. He tried to define the term "pure" in context of aesthetics, rather in terms of morality.<sup>53</sup> Such problematization is the result of the rigorous censorship that pervaded the Victorian literary scene. In her essay "A Preface Written to the Public: Print Censorship, Novel Prefaces and the Construction of a New Reading Public in Late-Victorian England", Barbara Leckie makes an interesting observation in this regard. According to her, the censorship on printed literature primarily concerns female readers as easily vulnerable to moral degeneration and therefore, should be kept in mind by the writer while producing a literary work. The writers, therefore, began to add long prefaces before their

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<sup>53</sup> **situation ethics**, also called **situational ethics**, in ethics and theology, the position that moral decision making is contextual or dependent on a set of circumstances.... Situation ethics was developed by American Anglican theologian Joseph F. Fletcher, whose book *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (1966) arose from his objections to both moral absolutism (the view that there are fixed universal moral principles that have binding authority in all circumstances) and moral relativism (the view that there are no fixed moral principles at all). Rosenthal, Sandra B.. "situation ethics". Encyclopedia Britannica, 8 Jan. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/situation-ethics>. Accessed 4 December 2022.

novels to explain their contents that follow. The prefaces serve as disclaimers written for the anticipated female readers. As Leckie says:

(The) perceived demand upon novelists that they must always consult an imagined young female reader – their teenage sister or daughter – worked neither within the established legal venue of censorship nor as implicit censorship. (448)<sup>54</sup>

This implies a literary and artistic anxiety concerning censorship. In fact, as I feel, such predominance of censorship and surveillance on art and literature has brought a decline in the aesthetic standards of late-Victorian literature. The infamous trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895, not only ruined his own literary career, but also affected the success of his ongoing play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1899) in theatre halls. Following his trial, the anxiety about issues such as homosexuality and other restricted sexual acts affected the minds of the writers and the general public too.

What appears to be more threatening to the Victorian state was the corrupting influences from the East. The famous translator Sir Richard Burton had to publish *The Kama Sutra of Vatsayana*, (1883) and *The Perfumed Garden of the Cheikh Nefzaoui* (1886) secretly for fear of prosecution. After his death in 1890, his wife feared social retribution because of the projection of transgressive sexuality in the texts her husband has translated and burned the manuscript of the new annotated edition of *The Perfumed Garden* and the diaries and journals of her late husband.<sup>55</sup> In her biography of her late husband, she has even projected him as a Catholic and moralist. Thus, the censorship has created almost a mass hysteria in the literary quarters causing permanent damage to the literature of the Victorian period.

The strategies of surveillance and vigilance upon and the consequent suppression and elimination of transgressive sexuality in the Victorian period has in fact, yielded often positive results by motivating the writers and artists to find novel and often strange ways to channelize the repressed sexuality. The revival of Gothic, vampiric tales as well as a surge of crime fiction,

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<sup>54</sup> Leckie, B. (2009). "A PREFACE IS WRITTEN TO THE PUBLIC": PRINT CENSORSHIP, NOVEL PREFACES, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW READING PUBLIC IN LATE-VICTORIAN ENGLAND. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37(2), 447-462. doi:10.1017/S1060150309090287. Accessed 5 December 2022.

<sup>55</sup> For a detailed account, see Sir Richard Burton: British scholar and explorer. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Burton-British-scholar-and-explorer>. Accessed 5 December 2022.

in the late-Victorian period, as I perceive, is perhaps a consequence of the censorship and restriction. Victorian society was however, prudish only in appearance. British aristocrats mostly frequented the notorious Holywell Street in London, the secret hub of pornography and banned literature.<sup>56</sup> This, I think, is perhaps the germ of bizarre and strange in late-Victorian literature.

## **2.4. Formation of Sexuality in the Victorian Period**

### **2.4.1. Foucaultian Assumptions of Sexuality**

So far, I have attempted to make a survey of the strategies of repression and regulation of sexuality by the Victorian state. Now I shall try to look at the process of formation of sexuality in Victorian England. For this purpose, it is indispensable to look at the operation of power as the formative principle of Victorian sexuality from the Foucaultian perspective. In his *The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume I*, Michel Foucault explores the realm of sexuality in Victorian England from the perspective of the operation of the matrix of power.

Foucault conceives power as neither an institution, nor a structure, but a “complex strategical situation in a particular society” (93). What appears to be important in the Foucaultian assumption of power is the interrelation between its agencies and its crystallization into state apparatuses and social hegemonies. In his problematized discourse on power, Foucault establishes it as a dynamic force operating from multiple sources, as relational and productive, as non-binary, multi-directional, and “power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume I* 194). The Foucaultian conception of power establishes it as an independent strategy, which operates according to its feasibility of investigation. In fact, power chooses sexuality as an area of discursive investigation not because of the affiliation of the former with a particular ideology or a system of production, but for the capability of its procedures and techniques of knowledge to investigate the subject (*History of Sexuality Volume I* 98).

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<sup>56</sup> See Matthew Green. The Secret History of Holywell Street: Home to Victorian London's Dirty Book Trade. <https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/the-secret-history-of-holywell-street-home-to-victorian-london-s-dirty-book-trade>. Accessed 5 December 2022.

In fact, the relationship between “power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are “matrices of transformations”” (*History of Sexuality Volume 1* 99). Such non-static relations of power and knowledge has made it subject to constant modification, reversal, and reconstruction and often subversive. In fact, as I feel, the emergence of subversive sexuality in the late Victorian period can be traced in these dynamic and reciprocal relations of power and knowledge. Foucault perceives power centres neither homogeneous nor discontinuous, but each centre has the potential to function in relation to other mechanisms of power (*History of Sexuality Volume 1* 100). He conceives sex as a discourse where power and knowledge negotiate in a complex manner to yield multiple discourses, which are “neither uniform nor stable” (*History of Sexuality Volume 1* 100). Moreover, he traces the irony in the operation of power through discourses.

According to Foucault, a discourse has the complex function to legitimize, reinforce, validate power on the one hand, while on the other it also subverts and thwarts power. The construction of innumerable discourses concerning sexuality in the Victorian period therefore, enforced suppression on homosexuality, pederasty, inversion, incest, sodomy on the one hand, while the discourses also paved the way to the production of counter discourses concerning ‘forbidden and aberrant sexual practices’ to thwart the institutionalized sexuality.

In *The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Foucault observes the inception of four strategies, which “formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex” (*History of Sexuality Volume 1* 103), since the eighteenth century. The four strategies are (a) “A hysterization of women’s bodies” (*History of Sexuality Volume 1* 104), (b) “A pedagogization of children’s sex” (*History of Sexuality Volume 1* 104), (c) “A socialization of procreative behaviour” (*History of Sexuality Volume 1* 104), and (d) “A psychiatrization of perverse pleasure” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1* 105).

‘The hysterization of women’s bodies’ (Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1* 104) consists of the clinical identification of the female body as saturated with sexuality and thereby vulnerable to sexual temptation. The image of Victorian ‘fallen woman’ as sexually active and in possession of everlasting passion appears to be a threat to the projection of a domestic and often ascetic woman as the essential part of the family. The female therefore, has to be projected as the symbol of the ideal family and motherhood as the source of morality to her children. According to Foucault, the image of the mother is a “nervous woman” (*History of Sexuality*

*Volume 1* 104) anxious for her children in the entire period of their childhood, adolescence and education presents the most visible image of the woman in the nineteenth century.

“The socialization of procreative behaviour” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1* 104) implies conferring a social responsibility on married couples to regulate their sexual behaviour according to the need of the purpose of fertility as they have the greater responsibility to contribute to the population. A whole body of medical discourses had been formed concerning fertility and birth control essential to bring the procreative behaviour under social regulation and control in Victorian England. This is what Foucault designates as “responsibilization of couples” (*History of Sexuality Volume 1* 105).

“The pedagogization of children’s sex” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1* 104) emanates from the idea of children as vulnerable to indulgence in sexual activity. Such conception entails an assumption of their vulnerability to engagement in sexual activities contrary to nature (masturbation, homosexuality, and pederasty) and therefore, a potential threat. Children “were defined as “preliminary” sexual beings” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1* 104). Hence, a body of parents, family members, doctors, teachers and psychiatrists were formed to regulate children’s sexuality. The laws of education and boarding schools in nineteenth century England testify the observation.

“The psychiatrization of perverse pleasure” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1* 105) entails the segregation of all non-normative forms of sexuality as clinical anomalies and the isolation of the sexual instinct “as a separate biological and psychical instinct” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1* 105). The clinical identification and segregation of non-normal sexuality as ‘abnormal’ follows the formation of a group of methodologies and techniques and their subsequent applications to treat the patient suffering from such anomalies. The methodology of treatment, although posed to be clinical, implies a moral purification of the soul. In his discussion of the method of the treatment of madness in asylums in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Vintage Books: 1988), Foucault observes the inherent moralist implications in the therapy to treat lunatics.

As Foucault says in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*:

Showers, hitherto less used than baths and drinks, now become the favored technique. And paradoxically, water regains, beyond all the physiological variations of the preceding epoch, its simple function of purification. The only quality attributed to it is violence, an irresistible flow washing away all the impurities that form madness; by its

own curative power, it reduces the individual to his simplest possible expression, to his merest and purest form of existence, thus affording him a second birth [...] (172)

The strategies, therefore, beginning in the eighteenth century, culminated in the late nineteenth century. As Foucault sums up:

Four figures emerged from this preoccupation with sex, which mounted throughout the nineteenth century [...] the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult. Each of them corresponded to one of these strategies which, each in its own way, invested and made use of the sex of women, children, and men. (*History of Sexuality Volume I*, 105)

Regarding the “deployment of sexuality” (*History of Sexuality Volume I* 130), Foucault has conceived the family as the centre emerging in the mid-nineteenth century (*History of Sexuality Volume I* 111). Before the eighteenth century, sex was associated with ecclesiastical concerns of sin. However, at the end of eighteenth century, there emerged a whole body of discourses related to pedagogy, medicine and economics to liberate sex from ecclesiastical control. Such liberation vis-a-vis secularization of sex was necessary to bring it under surveillance, even individual sexuality by making it a state subject. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, sex was conceived as a separate discipline of study in medical science. It entailed separation of the medicine to treat sexual problems from the medication of the body.

In fact, the psychoanalytical dimension of sex conceives sexual instinct as a separate entity, which requires specific forms of diagnosis and treatment different from the pathological problems. Psychiatric methods employed to treat ‘abnormal sexual behaviour’ entail close scrutiny, examination and uninterrupted surveillance corresponding to the state mechanism to watch sexuality. According to Foucault, psychoanalysis plays several roles in the “deployment of sexuality” (*History of Sexuality Volume I* 130). It has a formative role to lift injunctions from various sexual taboos in the twentieth century. However, Foucault has conceived the anti-repressive movements concerning sexuality as a strategic change of the state to sustain its control over the domain of sexuality. However, the appearance of a whole body of discourse to exert control over the area of aberrant sexuality, gives way to the construction of contrary discourse. According to Foucault:

(Homosexuality) began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or “naturalness” be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. (*History of Sexuality Volume 1* 101)

As I have said earlier, such multidirectional movement of power has created this multivalence of discourses that produced enthralling spectacles of Victorian sexuality.

#### **2.4.2. Homosocial Bonding**

The formulation of Victorian sexuality yielded a phenomenon, which is regarded by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as male homosocial desire. This idea has been coined to denote male bonding different from the homosexual bonding. As Sedgwick observes in *Between Men: English literature and male homosocial desire*:

(It) is applied to such activities as "male bonding," which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> To draw the "homosocial" back into the orbit of "desire," of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted. (1-2)

This idea of homosocial bonding is brought into the social and literary domain in order to avoid anxiety concerning homosexuality. Sedgwick, however, prefers to locate the libidinal tensions embedded in the idea of homosociality. According to Sedgwick, the bond between women did not generate the amount of tension, as did the bond between men (*Between Men* 2-3). The tension originated from the extreme homophobia in Victorian society. As I see, the patriarchy, which oppressed homosexuals, also oppressed women. Hence, the discontinuity between women loving women and women promoting the interest of women is not as compulsory as that between men as heterosexuality is an essential component of patriarchy and men are supposed to bear the responsibility to sustain that. I think that the valorisation of male bonding in Victorian literature is, in fact, a patriarchal façade to cover its embedded homophobia.

In *Between Men: English literature and male homosocial desire*, Sedgwick observes the presence of “obligatory heterosexuality” (3) as an essential component of the “male-dominated

kinship systems” (3) and homophobia as an obvious consequence of the institution of heterosexual marriage. She has identified homophobia as integral to patriarchy. According to her:

(The) homophobia directed against both males and females is not arbitrary or gratuitous, but tightly knit into the texture of family, gender, age, class, and race relations. Our society could not cease to be homophobic and have its economic and political structures remain unchanged. (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 3-4)

Although homophobia has been categorized as innate in any patriarchal structure, the male and female sexuality have been shaped and evolved in different historical contexts. In ancient Athenian society, the mature males used to keep younger boys as male minions as part of the custom of mentorship. Homophobia was not apparent, as homosexuality did not seem to them an obstacle to exert patriarchal control over men and women.

However, female homosexuality nurtured itself differently, in the domains of care, share and sisterhood. I think that the Victorian anxiety about homosexuality emanated from the vulnerability of the latter to indulge in the domains of female homosexuality. Such indulgence has the potential to unsettle the ideal Victorian image of man as virile, protector and master, the essential prerequisites of family constructed by the heterosexual marriage. The Victorians therefore, adapted the idea of mentorship from the ancient Athenians sans same-sex eroticism and sexual desire. In the popular construction of male kinship in Victorian literature, we come across two male companions. Among them, one is often superior to the other in terms of intellect, power, morality and shrewdness. It becomes obligatory for the superior to protect his ‘inferior’ male companion from all temptations of immoral desires and to act as his mentor to make him capable of accomplishing the social and political tasks bestowed upon them by the nation.

In her survey of British literature beginning with a review of the Shakespearean sonnets, Sedgwick finds gothic fiction of the nineteenth century as an interesting site to explore the formation of homosocial bonding. According to her:

The Gothic novel crystallized for English audiences the terms of a dialectic between male homosexuality and homophobia, in which homophobia appeared thematically in



paranoid plots. Not until the late-Victorian Gothic did a comparable body of homosexual thematics emerge clearly, however. (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 92)

It is significant that Sedgwick conceives Gothic as a crystallization of the aristocratic homosexual role (*Between Men* 94). This association of homosexuality with feudal aristocracy stands in contradiction with the growing middle class's homophobia extended by the idea of male bonding. The bourgeoisie, however, beat the decadent aristocracy at its own game. The Gothic, as I think, has become a paranoid expression of the decadent aristocracy, which nurtures a fascination for male homosexuality. The antithesis to that is the alliance of the enlightened bourgeois men with an argumentative mind and scientific temperament.

I feel that this alliance of essentially heterosexual males, founded on the principles of homosocial bonding, acts as redeemer to drive away the decadent supernatural, which dwells on non-normative sexuality. The element of heterosexuality has often been introduced to the bond by incorporating rivalry and jealousy for a common mistress. Sedgwick has identified the anxiety and homophobia inherent in The British Empire in the late nineteenth century. Such an anxiety springs from the growing correspondence with the culture of the colonies.

I think that apart from class, the racial issues began to manifest itself in the realm of sexuality. The fear of contamination of the moral fabric was synchronized with the anxiety of the corruption of the pure colonial blood. According to her, such an anxiety has brought two significant thematic changes in the gothic fiction. Firstly, the consciousness of class difference in early gothic has been transformed "into a less discriminate, more dichotomous and fantasy-prone distinction between the domestic and the exotic." (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 182). Secondly, in the wider and more expanded canvas of the gothic than the former, the sexual temptation and acts emanate from the "hypnosis" through "oriental techniques" (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 182). She refers to Sir Richard Burton<sup>57</sup> to show that the Empire has constructed the Mediterranean and the exploited Third World (Asia and Africa) as the cradles of homosexuality, pederasty and all other form of non-normative sexual 'vices'. As she comments on Burton:

Burton insists that the influence of the Sotadic Zone on "the Vice" is "geographical and climatic, not racial." His insistence is characteristic of an important element of the racism that accompanied European imperialism [...] Colonials, on the other hand, can "go"

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<sup>57</sup> For a detailed discussion, see *Between Men: English literature and male homosocial desire*. Page 182-183.

native: there is a taint of climate, morale, or ethos that, while most readily described in racial terms, is actually seen as contagious. (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 183)

The idea of the Orient emerged as sexually non-normative and therefore, a potential threat to the Western structure of heterosexuality in the Victorian period of the nineteenth century. The anxiety of the Empire concerning non-normative sexuality was problematized by the intrusion and intermingling of racial anxiety about the colonies. For example, Sir Richard Burton accused the Turks as sexual predators and moral corruptors of the whole Mesopotamia and Asia Minor region. He refers to them as “‘Unspeakable Turk’, a race of born pederasts” (Quoted in Sedgwick, *Between Men* 189). This observation of Sedgwick appears to be significant, as I seem to think, in context of the setting of most of the gothic novels in the Mediterranean and in Eastern Europe, adjacent to Turkey. In the vocabulary of Burton, according to Sedgwick, the anxiety about sodomy and pederasty, prerogatives of the Orient, culminates in the horrid image of male rape, in the imagination of the Empire (193).

Sedgwick observes a curious manipulation of the homosocial bonding in the late-Victorian period in her discourse on Kipling’s *Kim*. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, in the “arena of race and national culture” (*Between Men* 196), the Empire has attempted to, as she comments:

(Construct) a position of apparent "androgyny" or halfway-ness that, while pretending to share equally in the qualities of two symmetrically opposite groups, really manipulated the asymmetry of their status for personal advancement. (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 196-197)

As I interpret, as a half-street urchin of India in appearance and a pupil of the remedial public school, *Kim*, the protagonist of *Kim* (1901) by Rudyard Kipling successfully accomplished his task in espionage by resisting the exotic hypnosis of the Oriental mentors. He has exploited his homosocial bonding with the Lama and Mehbub Ali quite successfully to accomplish the strategic responsibilities bestowed upon him by the Emperor. As part of the British education system, homosocial bonding appears to him as a relatively safer site to explore transcending the geographical limits of sexual ‘vices’ as the space is relatively liberated from homophobia.

Sedgwick observes an element of effeminacy in the male-to-male sexual relationship prevalent among the feudal aristocrat (*Between Men* 206). Such an effeminacy undoubtedly

implies a reduction of masculinity. The emergence of the bourgeoisie has not only changed the dynamics of power, but also altered the shape and function of the homosocial as well as the homosexual. As Sedgwick sees it:

With the expanding number, visibility, and scope of the educated middle class, a new range of male homosocial bonds emerged, connected to new configurations of male homosexuality. A nominally individualistic and meritocratic, often precarious, and authentically anxious path of economic and social life had to be forged by each man of this class; newly exclusive and enforced gender roles gave an apparent ideological distinctness to the amorphous new class [...] (*Between Men* 207)

The consequence of the above enforcement of gender roles is the exploration of male bonds by the new bourgeois young individual without implications of feminization. The alliance of bourgeois men implicates exclusion of women from their private lives as a strategy of self-virility. Unlike the aristocrats in Britain, burdened with Puritanic conservatism concerning sexuality, according to Sedgwick, the bourgeoisie has chosen the classical Greek model of mentorship sans sexuality where women are essentially excluded from all activities of training, mentorship politics and military affairs (*Between Men* 207). The ideology held by the bourgeoisie appear to be contradictory, which problematizes the domain of sexuality to create possibilities of subversion. Sedgwick, by referring to various case studies infers the embedded misogyny in the acts of sexual inversion practiced and indulged by men. The Victorian age, as she has summed up, manifests,

(The) mutual distinctness of the aristocratic-style, ascriptively feminine, "tragic," and affluent or apolitical male homosexual stereotype on the one hand, and on the other the actively, projectively homophobic mass culture founded on male bonds [...] (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 217)

#### **2.4.3. Formation of Masculinity in the Victorian Period**

The idea of homosociality, as we have observed in the previous section, is a consequence of the construction of masculinity. Thus, I think, it is pertinent to look at the formation of the idea of masculinity itself in the Victorian period. In her seminal study on masculinity, *Masculinities*, R. W. Connell has charted the evolution of the idea of masculinity in course of European and American history. She has identified "the unprecedented growth of European and North

American power, the creation of global empires and a global capitalist economy, and the unequal encounter of gender orders in the colonized world” (Connell 185) as the principal factors contributing to the construction and evolution of masculinity. In fact, according to her, the expansion of the empire and the construction of masculinity have a reciprocal impact on each other (Connell 185). The paradigmatic shift in the construction of European masculinity came with the establishment of The British Empire, which has a dimension concerning gender. The initiative began with the endeavours of a group of segregated men, who opted for the vocation of adventure trade and soldiering in colonies.

The men who unleashed force and indiscriminate violence to conquer colonies and extort wealth from there, had been hailed as the icons of masculinity. Moreover, the development of cities like London with a new lifestyle had an obvious impact on gender roles. As Connell points out:

The entrepreneurial culture and workplaces of commercial capitalism institutionalized a form of masculinity, creating and legitimising new forms of gendered work and power in the counting-house, the warehouse and the exchange. (188)

Such culture has promoted the necessity to have a personal identity as man or woman, rather than mere social identification as the possessor of a male or a female body. Connell points out that the emergence of hegemonic masculinity in the eighteenth century is a consequence of the continual civil wars in Europe and the colonies in the previous centuries.

The British Government has established a trained military force equipped with weapons as part of its endeavour of protection and advancement. The army, promoted as the icon of masculinity and valorised with national sentiment had become an essential part of the modern state with integral connotations of masculinity (Connell 189). Connell attributes three principal factors, which were instrumental in the process of displacement of gentry masculinity<sup>58</sup> with new hegemonic masculinities in the nineteenth century: “challenges to the gender order by women, the logic of the gendered accumulation process in industrial capitalism, and the power relations of empire” (191). The hegemonic masculinity appears to be a combination of violence and rationality in war, enterprise, bureaucratic management and administrative policies before it

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<sup>58</sup> See Connell 190-191.

splits into various complexes following a disruption by the end of Fascism, the culminating point of its development since the eighteenth century.

As I see, in the late Victorian age, the growing fear about the feminization of boys accelerated the need to create separate sphere for boys and girls. Physical training became an essential part of educational curriculum along with ideals of adventure into distant places that require physical strength, courage, quick-witted mind capable of enduring threats and adversities. The growing trend of specialization in the field of production constructed experts in specific labour. Such specifications and compartmentalization of labour in production require alliance between men, who are competent enough to complement each other in the successful accomplishment of a given task. The late nineteenth century British novels of adventure, such as *Kim* (1901) by Rudyard Kipling, have attempted to represent the idea of alliance between competent males. In them, knowledge and competence in bushcraft, astronomy, mathematics, geology, zoology and military skills appeared as essential requirements to survive in the wilderness of Asia and Africa.

The group of adventurers customarily comprises veteran former soldiers like Sir Richard Francis Burton or adventurers with experience and young enthusiasts with physical prowess and zeal for adventures. Such combination leads to the idea of mentorship in homosocial bonding and it is the key to success in any adventure. Hegemonic masculinity, in fact, emerged from the necessity of such alliance in imperial projects. Such alliance implicates not only the inclusion of the hegemonic males in the team, but also exclusion of women and 'sexual deviants' like homosexuals from it. As Connell says:

From the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, the potential for homoerotic pleasure was expelled from the masculine and located in a deviant group, symbolically assimilated to women or to beasts. There was no mirror type of 'the heterosexual'. Rather, heterosexuality became a required part of manliness. (196)

The exclusion of the 'deviant' from the domain of male bonding is part of the strategy of hegemonic masculinity. Since the purpose of hegemonic masculinity is to oppress and marginalize women, any form of sexuality, which does not correspond with characteristic male behaviour, has to be expunged. As Connell sums up:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (77)

The strategies of oppression, construction of homosocial bonding and hegemonic masculinity constructed heteronormativity in the Victorian period. The term “heteronormativity” was coined by M. Warner in his article “Introduction: Fear of a queer planet” published in 1991. In *The Conundrum of Masculinity: Hegemony, Homosociality, Homophobia and Heteronormativity*, Chris Haywood, Thomas Johansson, Nils Hammarén, Marcus Herz and Andreas Ottemo mention:

The concept of heteronormativity is sometimes used to describe a body of lifestyle norms as well as how people tend to reproduce distinct and complementary genders (man and woman) [...] (and) works as a tool to analyse *systems* of oppression and contributes to an understanding of how masculinity as well as more general gender structures and hierarchies are constructed in society. (101)

The concept of heteronormativity entails the cultural implications of heterosexual hegemonic masculinity. The concept has consistently been referred to contemporary queer theory to critique hegemonic masculinity. Heteronormativity not only entails the strategies of repression, but also helps us to analyze the process of formation of the sexual codes and their subsequent subversions. According to Chris Haywood et al., heteronormativity primarily consists of the four components of sexuality: monogamous lives and marriage (essentially heterosexual), middle-class sexuality, white sexuality and gendered positions within family and society (102). The above components endeavour to substantiate the interrelation between class, race, production system and sexuality. S. Jackson endorsed this idea in his assumption of sex in *Heterosexuality in Question*. According to Jackson:

Everyday heterosexuality is not simply about sex, but is perpetuated by the regulation of marriage and family life, divisions of waged and domestic labour, patterns of economic support and dependency. (26, quoted in Chris Haywood et al., 102)

The components of heteronormativity constructs sexual binaries. It promotes heterosexual monogamy over anarchic polygamy through academic curriculum, sexual codes of sophisticated whites over deviant black (women and men), pure and appropriate sexuality of the middle class over the inappropriate sexual behaviour of the ‘filthy’ working class and heterosexual family men over the feminized gay men. The deviants are carefully identified, categorized and expunged as dangerous ‘other’, as potential threats to heteronormativity. However, their presence is acknowledged, analyzed and continually talked about to validate the codes of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity, as I deduce, renders how heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity have been naturalised and normalised as default choices of an individual and even resorts to violence to discipline and materializes the body to fit into its normative structure. According to Chris Haywood et al.:

As a consequence of its promotion as being a life choice, heteronormativity also acts as violence against bodies and people not fitting into the narrow normative life choices. These could be sexual minorities or transsexual people who are vulnerable to violence through their own being. (102)

The forms of violence entail linguistic trivialization, forced marginalization and demonization, corrective treatment and even elimination. The Victorian age displays an exercise of all these forms, but above all, demonization and elimination through violence. A vast body of Victorian literature exemplify how the sexually deviant other has consistently been demonized in popular imagination and their elimination been normalised as routine task of sanitization.

#### **2.4.4. Gender Performativity**

In her study of the subversion of heteronormativity in *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler has identified four domains of subversion of the normative, namely, domain of the symbolic in language, theorized by Julia Kristeva, construction of intersexed bodies in Michel Foucault, transcendental lesbianism of Monique Wittig, performative subversion theorized by herself. She has endorsed the assumptions of Julia Kristeva to perceive the potential of language to exert a symbolic subversion of heteronormativity. Kristeva conceives semiotics as a “dimension of language occasioned by the primary maternal body”(Butler, 101). Poetic language, therefore, implies the recovery of the maternal body and thereby has the potential to disrupt, subvert and displace the paternal law. As Butler observes:

(For) Kristeva poetic language breaks the incest taboo and, as such, verges always on psychosis. As a return to the maternal body and a concomitant deindividuation of the ego, poetic language becomes especially threatening when uttered by women. The poetic then contests not only the incest taboo, but the taboo against homosexuality as well. Poetic language is thus, for women, both displaced maternal dependency and, because that dependency is libidinal, displaced homosexuality. (110)

Hence, poetic language not only interrogates the idea of incest as a taboo, but also challenges the othering of homosexuality. Butler reiterates the Foucaultian assumption of the intersexed body or the body of the hermaphrodite as a subversion of the categorization of sex (122). Such a displacement of binary categorization of sex promotes proliferation of pleasurable acts beyond the binary construction of sex in heteronormativity. Foucault looks at it as an emancipatory ideal, which results in the release of primary sexual multiplicity (Butler, 123). According to Butler, Foucault has attempted a quest for identity in the late nineteenth century with the inception of *scientia sexualis* (135).

According to Butler, Monique Wittig regards “male”, “female”, “masculinity”, “femininity” as concepts restricted with the heterosexual matrix as “normal” and “natural” phenomena to avoid a subversive critique (144). Wittig conceives lesbian woman as a subversion of the categorization of sex. As Butler explains:

(A) lesbian, she (Wittig) maintains, transcends the binary opposition between woman and man; a lesbian is neither a woman nor a man. But further, a lesbian has no sex; she is beyond the categories of sex. Through the lesbian refusal of those categories, the lesbian exposes...the contingent cultural constitution of those categories and the tacit yet abiding presumption of the heterosexual matrix. (144)

Following her discourse on subversive strategies proposed by her predecessors, Butler proceeds to construct her own theorization of performative subversions. She conceives gender as a “fabrication” and a “a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies” (174). The bodily performances, such as drag, cross-dressing implies parody of primary gender identity. Although these acts have been regarded as degrading or appropriation of stereotyping in Feminist criticism, Butler has regarded them as the opportunities to reframe gender and the gendered experiences. The discrepancy between the anatomy of the performer ( Butler has stated “drag” as an example) and the gender that is performed, one could trace the “presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and



gender performance” (175). The discrepancy between the anatomy and gender of the performer manifests a dissonance not only “between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance” (Butler, 175). As Butler sums up:

In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity. (175)

Such parodic performances and their proliferation not only have brought an openness in the process of recontextualization of gender, but also resist the attempt to attribute naturalness to the theoretical premises of heteronormativity concerning gender. Butler conceives gender itself as a repetitive performance:

(Gender) is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (179)

Since gender is based on performance, which implies an externalization of the gendered body in a public space corresponding to ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ categories, subversive bodily acts and parodic performance of the dichotomous physical act between performing body and gendered body, has the potential to interrogate and resist the categorization of gender by heteronormativity.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

The Modernists such as Virginia Woolf perceived the Victorian age as characterized by puritanism, prudishness about and repression and elimination of sexual preferences, act and orientation. Such a view cannot be undermined in view of the formation and implementation of various laws and acts exerting stringent prohibition and criminalization on various sexual practices such as polygamy, pre-marital sex, abortion, homosexuality, incest, bestiality, pederasty and many others.

In his *The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Michel Foucault has charted the strategies in detail as part of the Victorian intent to discipline sex in order to regulate and sustain the mode of capitalist production. However, the Victorian strategy to discipline and regulate sexuality produced a vast body of discourses to open up sexuality in the public domain with a purpose of restricting the thought process of the citizens of Victorian Britain concerning sexuality. Such a strategy has ironically started a critical curiosity about sexuality. Moreover, excessive control and repression have opened popular inquisitiveness about the subject, which has consequentially materialized in the formation of a vast body of fictional and critical discourse of subversion.

Moreover, the growing panic over the expanding capitalist economy and the suspicious anticipation of the consequences of the ongoing cultural negotiation and exchange with colonies resulted in the emergence and growth of the image of the uncanny in the Victorian Empire. The image has made an obvious intrusion in popular Victorian imagination manifested in fiction. In fact, fiction has become the chosen and beloved genre of Victorian capitalism to express its anxieties and aspirations of empire because of its integral connection with commercial issues such as profit, proliferation, expansion of the enterprise as well as the formation of a viable and sustained body of readers/consumers to sustain the growth of this prospective business.

The anxieties concerning the fate of the empire had been coupled with the fear that emanated from sexual repression. Together they produced the genres such as adventure, romance, science fiction and a revived and reshaped form of the gothic. Among the Victorians, the gothic appears to be a favourite as it embodies the anxieties of empire concerning its relation with colonies. The fear of social castration for the vulnerability of the individual to the repressed forms of sexuality and also the aspiration of the Victorian bourgeoisie to establish a unitary and 'ideal' state appropriate for the proliferation of capital by eliminating the deviant forces.

As an embodiment of conflicting fears and desires, Victorian gothic and vampire fiction emerged as extremely complex sites of subversion as well as assertion of the Victorian temperament. In the next chapter, I shall try to examine gothic and vampire fiction in relation to the anxiety of empire and repression of sexuality and its subsequent strategies of subversion.