"George Eliot's overpowering dislike of egotism makes her paint portraits of self-centred tyrants," said Khan, "These ruthless and incisive portraits make the reader cringe with terror." Khan cited other such characters of Eliot's - Melema in Romola, Casaubon in Middle-March are also epitomes of egotism.

Daniel Deronda is very much a story about Gwendolen's metamorphosis from a spoilt, naïve and rather shallow young woman to a self-restrained, mature individual with spiritual depth, after she has been through the shock of Grandcourt's abuse and been benefited by Deronda's unstinting friendship. She is strong enough to even withstand Deronda's refusal of her love, which she craves for; even though he loves her he does not attempt to carry the relationship to a more permanent level because he is a man of principle. He decides to remain her mentor and marries another woman Mira whom he has saved as well and is promised to. "The appearance of sobriety" said Khan, "affectation of calm when the soul is being shred by tumultuous conflicts bring into operation all the subtle but palpable effects of the Aristotelian catharsis, Deronda's anguished withdrawal from Gwendolen is handled so sensitively that the novel gains in dimension."

According to Khan, this is Eliot's way of punishing Gwendolen for her early follies: "For Gwendolen remains the dreariness of life plagued by longing and unredeemed love."

Yet painful realities seem to be Eliot's necessary formula for self development, without such suffering one cannot grow spiritually. "The vital function these turmoils are to perform" said Khan in her lecture, "is to complete the process of inner growth. Before this final stage is reached, prejudices have to be swept away, illusions removed, the subtle hiatus between appearance and reality clearly and firmly established."

Khan remarked that this kind of awakening is nothing new in either literature or life and has been experienced by real men and women and depicted in fiction, poetry and drama many times.

"Like many other dynamic writers, she unravels the mysteries of human experience by pinpointing the moments of clear perception which comes after intense mental anguish caused by crises in human relationships, social conflicts and multiple circumstances." It is this "exploration of the minutest tremors of the psyche" that distinguishes Eliot from the more familiar path of Victorian novelists.



George Eliot

Khan also talked about George Eliot's development of creative prowess in this last novel: "All the probable facets of a known human predicament used in the novel are carefully weighed and analysed. We are not allowed to form a one-sided opinion of anything. She uses her erudition, her experience, contacts with people in her art to the full so that even when the last two novels of the latter years are compared one notices the advance in handling language and fiction in maintaining poise against any kind of bias or prejudice."

A lively discussion followed after the lecture where George Eliot's life was a major topic. Eliot's real name was Mary Ann (Marian) Evans. She used a pen name in order to be taken seriously as a writer, aware of the chauvinism regarding female writers: "Women writers are always fearful of being stereotyped as feminine etc...she wanted to be considered as a writer, not a female" said Khan. In her personal life Eliot was quite unconventional and often defied the norms of genteel Victorian society. She fell in love with a married man - philosopher and critic George Henry Lewes and soon they decided to live together. Although not legally married, Evans considered Lewes to be her husband and they were very happy till Lewes's death. Towards the end of her life, Eliot created another sensation by marrying a man twenty years younger than her although she died several months into this marriage.

Her own defiance of societal norms no doubt, crept into her novels which often deal with unconventional themes- love between a married woman and unmarried man, a child born out of wedlock, abusive husbands these were realities in Eliot's days as they are now, but writing about them at that time was a radical step. "In every novel" said Khan, "there are strains of anticipation of the coming modern century; the attitudes reflected are not at all Victorian."

George Eliot, in fact, could very well be writing about contemporary society where women are often forced to go against their heart for the sake of financial security and propriety, where passion often overpowers conventional wisdom and individuals have to learn the hard way before spiritual peace can be attained. As Khan has alluded to, George Eliot's characters are complex and multidimensional possessing human frailties and going through intense psychological transitions, with some of them managing to overcome their baser characteristics, to grow into stronger, nobler, beings.