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MODERNISM IN THE ATTITUDE OF HARDY'S FEMALE CHARACTERS

Ms. Pallavi S. Ambhore

Assistant Professor, Dpt.of English, Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Amravati.

ABSTRACT:

Thomas Hardy was a conscientious artist and believed that the novel should be as much of a whole as a living organism, in which all components such as plot, dialogue, character, scenery are fitly framed together, giving the impression of a harmonious blending. He has unfolded feminine characters with all her subtlety, emotionalism, and passionate Adour in his novels. His treatment of women was quite different from that of his predecessors. Hardy was the first novelist who made advancement in the sphere of treatment of women. He stresses their frailty, their sweetness, their submissiveness, their coquetry, their caprice. Even when they are at faults, he presents them with a tender chivalry. This attitude was partly due to Hardy's temperament; he was the born lover of the fair sex.



KEYWORDS: Thomas Hardy , harmonious blending , sphere of treatment of women.

INTRODUCTION

Here there is an analysis of the presentation of women characters in the works of Thomas Hardy, with special focus on the female characters in Tess of the D'Urbervilles (Tess), Jude the Obscure (Susanna Bridehead), Far From the Madding Crowd (Bathsheba Everdene), The Mayor of Casterbridge (Elizabeth Jane). In these four novels Hardy depicts a variety of female protagonists, as well as demonstrating how these women, find very different outlets for their opposition to

social conventions.

HARDY'S MODERN WOMEN:-

In most of Hardy's major novels, the evolution and emergence of the New Woman and a sense of female empowerment are the common themes because he was keenly aware of the radically changing world at the end of the Victorian Era, not only this but the struggles women faced in their evolution from a subservient role to the empowered new woman figure. Hardy's heroines represent the strife and struggle of Victorian women. Women in Victorian society were agitating for their rights, emancipation and

empowerment. We see these qualities in Hardy's women characters. In Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure, Mayor of Casterbridge, and Far From the Madding Crowd, there is a unique portrayal of women characters like Tess, Sue Bridehead, Elizabeth Jane and Bathsheba Everdene. Once we get acquaintance with them, they linger in our memory all the way through our life. These women are so powerfully drawn that they go on haunting us.

Tess She is not timid like the early women, who were not courageous to solve the complications alone in their lives. But here Tess has that

power to face it. We can see her gallant and modern nature from the very beginning of the novel. Tess is seen rebelling against her female stereotypical roles when she turns virgin to unmarried mother and from deserted wife to a mistress. She is keenly conscious of her duty as the eldest child in the family. She feels constantly solicitous throughout the story about the welfare of her brothers and sisters. Her self respect would not allow her to go there in the capacity of the poor relation but her feeling of responsibility for the death of Prince, the horse, compels her to do so. Tess is not mean to kill Prince, but she is punished anyway, just as she is unfairly punished for her own rape by Alec. She is always ready to give them financial help with the last penny she has got. She is determined to the self sufficient and willing to sacrifice her well being for the good of others. This makes her selfless and on a morally higher ground than other characters in the novel. She is not ready to depend on her parents for money as she is modern and self dependent girl by nature. Tess is able to bear the great burdens placed upon her at a young age. She is between the age of 16 and 23, when we read her tale. This ability to undergo so much at such a young age builds her character so that we see her powerful force in the novel. She accepts blame for Prince's death, the death of her infant child, Sorrow; the loss of Angel and destruction of her marriage; as well as her killing Alec with her own hands and leaving home three times in her life to "taste the water of the world", outside the village.

In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, heroine of the novel Bathsheba Everdene, is a beautiful young woman, who is at the center of the novel and who must choose among three very different suitors. She is the protagonist, who propelling the plot, through her interaction with various suitors. In some ways, *Far From the Madding Crowd* is a traditional novel of marriage, meaning that a heroine is given a choice of two or more suitors but at the end of the novel she chooses the right one. She is an unconventional woman and she defies the conventions of the time.

Bathsheba, very early in the story finds herself a woman of independence means and therefore at liberty to choose a mate regardless of worldly considerations or indeed not to choose a mate if that is her wish. Bathsheba's economic and emotional independence allow her the choice of not marrying, and she has an interest in maintaining the farm and preserving her freedom. Her maiden purity is associated with another desire for her: her earning to be independent. We must admire this woman for the tremendous self confidence and for the practical sense that she displays when she suddenly finds herself the mistress of a big farm. 'as the mistress of the farm', - a role for which her earlier life has not prepared her - she is responsible for property and people: buildings, livestock, and the men and women who work for her but her instinct not surprisingly, impel her not in the direction of becoming a representative of power and authority but to respond as a woman capable of love and passion. Though Bathsheba suffers from a number of weaknesses, like vanity, love of flattery, wildness of temper, and impulsiveness, at the same time she possesses certain qualities which greatly raise her in our estimation and regard. Her practical sense, her courage, her self confidence, her endurance of misfortune, her maidenly purity and her guilelessness, make her worthy of a heroine. Her roles make her independent and successful lady. Through the character of Bathsheba Hardy has presented a very rare kind of Victorian woman, one who is proud, strong and independent.

Elizabeth Jane, from *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, is drawn in the softest of half tones, and does not at once catch the eye but a longer acquaintance with her, reveals her fascination. She is a single hearted girl; with a marked "willness to sacrifice personal comfort and dignity to the common weal." Her personality is light and unemphatic, perhaps excessively modest in the earlier stages. But her personality develops, first under suffering, and later with her marriage to Farfrae. Though she sees towards only the dark side of life, due to her painful experiences from her faithful persons, we must admire her for the inborn qualities which we see as the story develops. The first quality is that, she has a great power of endurance and ready to face any kind of situation before her patiently, without complaining anything to anyone. In the whole novel we never see her crying or screaming. Although she has a melancholy air, Elizabeth Jane has a good ability to love, giving it to her mother, her father, her stepfather and later her husband. Calm and capable Elizabeth Jane becomes independent in her care for others.

Though Elizabeth always has some reluctant attitude towards life, at the same time she is very bold and quick in action. There are ample of examples of Elisabeth Jane's boldness in the novel. In the very first meeting of Elizabeth Jane and Henchard, the Mayor, without any hesitation in her actions, very boldly, she goes to Henchard and convey him about the arrival of Susan in his town. To add learning to her knowledge, she studied books of philosophy and becomes 'a young pursuing woman'. Such habit of serious reading is a characteristic of most of Hardy's idealists. She does not simply cram information or amuse herself in the intellectual gymnasium of philosophy.' She translates her thought into action and follows her philosophy as a way of life.

Jude the Obscure is an unmistakably contemporary novel in concentrating on central questions of the late nineteenth century, not only discussing the difficulties of being a working woman also shows being simply an independent woman, the strain of professional ambition in an increasingly striated society, the loss of religious faith in a conventional society and the revision of class based university ambitions. The character of sue, at first sight one of the most innovatory aspects of the book, is in some respects only a more extreme, much franker treatment of a type that Hardy has portrayed many times before. In this character of sue, Hardy also draws on the contemporary phenomenon of the new woman, who had been denied an autonomous existence, rigid traditional marriage rules and was asserting her claim to independence of thought and action. Sue demonstrates, women can be strong, thoughtful, and capable of being a friend on equal intellectual footing with a man. In many ways, she is a feminist before her time.

According to her, woman should be allowed to undo marriages that are certainly mistakes. She is also sure that lots of women feel this way, only they don't say so, only due to the impact of rigid social and religious conditions. But sue dared to crack the shekels of this society and live with Jude without marriage after taking divorce from her husband Phillotson. In this respect she must be the first presentation of a new woman, becoming more and more common in the 21st century. Sue is completely different from Hardy's other heroines because her concept, her thinking about marriage is different from that of the other women characters in his novels.

CONCLUSION:-

Of course life is not like a bed of roses, without any hurdles, but it depends on us how to spend it. May be while living, these heroines take some times the wrong decisions, but they never come on the decision to kill themselves, at any condition. They are bold, educated, independent, self-confident, have the ability of decision making, unconventional, have the confidence to speak against the bad, traditional, some religious unwanted customs, swim against the stream, courageous, convincing attitude, very positive about their life, and most of all their zest to live the life in any condition, these are the major qualities of female characters of Hardy which we witness prominently in Tess, Bathsheba, Sue and Elizabeth.

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