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Feministic Perspective in Thomas Hardy's Novels

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Abstract:

During the Victorian Period males and females were not treated equally. The gender became a major division between man and woman, as they are two different individuals differing in psychological behaviour due to their inherited genders. They are two poles of a battery one negative and the other positive, which attract each other but differ in mental and emotional sphere. They are neither identical nor their behaviour and attitude towards life matches each other. 'The Post Modern Theory' of understanding literature had opened the broader vision of human understanding of the text. The connotation of feminism is not only concentrated upon the position and identification of women but it opens those broader aspects of understanding the text in which the writer has created his characters. From the time when life came into existence the concept of feminism also started it had many concerns and keeping them in mind the novelist – Thomas Hardy keeps the prime concern to depict the predicament of woman as a sole individual. With the rise of feminist journals many laws were revised and issues related to rape, family violence, education, working conditions, health care, welfare, social status, equality and justice and the place of women in society were made a little better with the coming of the laws she started descending from her cocoon of fear and anxiety. The main object of feminism is to discard 'the power build relationship' - where one group, which is definitely the male, controls the women. In order to gain equal status a transformation in both the genders is very important. The male must first use coercive techniques to reduce the ill practices such as rape, molestation, wife beating, sexual abuse and all other forms of violence.

Keywords: Feminism, Psychological, Predicament, Coercive

Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840 at Higher Bockhampton three miles away from Dorchester. Thomas Hardy from the very beginning was not a very social individual he always loved to be alone and was a very sensitive person. He never wanted to know or meet any person in his life. He was fond of old memories and he has used them in all his novels. Some of his great works are – 'Far From the Madding Crowd', 'The Return of the Native', 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles', 'The Mayor of'

Casterbridge' and many others. Hardy's novels are very interesting and have very much connection with real life. These have a touch of romance, fantasies, tragedies, comedies and scientific attitude towards life. All the novels are connected to the rural and the urban environment focussing on the change of the contemporary society and hence make a complete whole. Hardy was not popular in a day it took him a long passage of time to overcome the obstacles, which stood between him and his success. All his novels are based on his real life experiences and has just added some spices to it. Thomas Hardy, one of the greatest novelists of the Victorian Period had presented human life in a perfect style, where man has been presented fighting against the forces of nature, society and with his/her emotions. The trio-struggle of an individual for the perfection of the universe is a story of struggle throughout life. The contemporary Victorian society directly or indirectly shaped the ideas, which Hardy cited in his novels.

Feminism is concerned with woman and her status in society in contrast with her male counterpart. Basically it refers, to the equal treatment of women with her male counterpart. It was first advocated by Mary Wallenstonecraft in 'A Vindication of the Rights of woman (1792). Feminism is a clear perspective to give due respect and attention, space, opportunity to women in contrast to their male compatriots. Feminism states that with the uplifting of women's position in society the entire universe will advance. Feminism is a search of selfhood, which has traditionally been a male prerogative it is a kind of battle of struggle for both personal and social identity.

In fact the feministic literary criticism has brought a lot of changes in understanding the contexts of the text, as P Waugh puts, "Feminists brought to literature a suspicion of established ideas which made their approach truly revolutionary."

Feminism is a serious endeavour to take into consideration the subordinate position of women in this world of discrimination with regard to gender inequality. The condition of women and her suffering have persecuted since long and is still present to some extent but the first significant document of protest by a women, Christened Pizan's- *The Book of the City of Ladies*(1405) raised her voice against the ill treatment and discrimination of females. Since then many writers have come into force and have given their best creative work in helping this movement to improve the sad plight of women in society.

The purpose of Hardy's novels is not to bring a revolution as writers of that time must have done, but he was able to germinate those seeds of females' rights by creating the characters such as Tess and Bathsheba. The fine female characters of Hardy are presented in a manner, which is clearly advocating and space providing. However, the Victorian society was more and more traditional; the presentation of the novelist is superior to the established ideologies of the contemporary society. Hardy was thinking on a progressive line to provide his female characters a status despite of

the reverse attitude of the society .He was categorically going against the established norms of the Victorian society in which there were different yardsticks for males and females. His use of the word 'pure' for Tess in his novel 'TessD'Urbervilles', despite of the loss of her chastity is an awakening attitude of the so-called taboos of that period. He believed in the real psychological behaviour of the character and not what he or she did in the circumstances all around.

Hardy's heroines can change situations and circumstances according to themselves. In his novel 'Far from the Madding crowd' Bathsheba Everdene promised to marry Boldwood but soon she realized that Sergeant Troy was a better option for her and denied Boldwoods proposal and united with Sergeant Troy .She was born and brought up in an urban family and hence was far very futuristic and far sighted woman. 'Far from the Madding Crowd 'deals with a heroine than a hero, which is prevalent in almost all Hardy's novel. She is beautiful and an echo of the biblical Bathsheba whom King David seduced and married. Bathsheba in this novel attracts three very different suitors thus forming a love triangle between common place man of the soil Gabriel Oak, the dashing young soldier Sergeant Troy and the respectable, middle aged farmer Boldwood. Bathsheba Everdene is the only woman around whom three men are moving and are trying to persuade her. Masculinity even becomes subdued and compromising, whereas females of Hardy's novel face the cause and challenges whether destined or acquired. This proves the attitude of a novelist who has been preventing females in a focussed way through his creative artistic vision. Most of Hardy's heroines are well educated and well versed and maintain a balancing attitude towards people and society. Although all the characters in his novels face ups and down but they also move altogether, yet the novels come to its conclusion portraying life with its realistic features. Hardy's novels include two types of personalities educated and rustic. Hardy portrays women of rural areas in such a way that they have great understanding and concern for their fellow men they understand all the situations and fit in well according to the need of the circumstance.

Hardy depicts the scenes according to need as in the case of 'The Return of the Native' which is Hardy's very famous fiction. He has made the novel picturesque one by creating the imaginary view of the Egdon Heath that is a major attraction for all the readers. Hardy is clever enough to gain sympathy and attraction for all characters in his novels. Thomasin in 'The Return of the Native' is a daring example of Hardys work though she is born an brought up in the Egdon Heath which was not very much developed nor did she get the opportunity to educate herself as she stayed with her aunt and cousin Clym. But Hardys prentation of Thomsain in the Egdon Heath is so much touchy that the readers can't forbid stopping reading. Hardys Thomsain is so determined that after uniting with Wildeve she is being treated badly by him-she feels helpless and is aware that her husband will leave her all alone one day but she keeps everything to herself as she knows that she has already hurt her aunt by marrying against her wishes this shows her immense feeling of sacrifice which Hardy has portrayed through Thomsain.

Hardy's male characters (Wildeve, Clym, Gabriel Oak, Henchard) in all his novels do not have their own identity and they always revolve around their female counterpart. Without the heroine the novels could not have gained so much popularity. All the women were not given the freedom of expression, most of them were marginalized by the male members of the society and who broke apart the norms created by the society were not given the due respect and adoration by the society. As we can see in the novel 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' she suffers not because of her own but due to the ill circumstances which come along her way. She becomes a victim of others' crime but no one around her thinks positive or good about her. She is totally shattered and ruined in her life even though it was not her decision to go with Alec D'Urbervilles but her fate wanted it to happen. Hardy had created Tess and she has taken all the attention of the readers as her pain and suffering were so intense that they had touched the sentiments and emotions of all the readers. The male atrocities have been a continuous torture and torments on females as the latter have been addressed as 'Weaker sex' and 'Marginalised' in literature. But Hardy's perception of Tess as a pure woman despite losing her chastity is the most favourable presentation of the females.

Men have been in all times and ages cursed women in 'The Mayor of Casterbridge' Henchard is a big drunkard and puts his wife and daughter for auction for a mere five guineas. He always cursed his wife Susan for his misfortune. Hardy depicted that women were treated merely as animals that have no wishes and no hopes they just have to live and work for the welfare of other beings around her. Hardy in all his novels has tried to show the real cause and effect of women. She is not considered an important element of the society. She is neither respected by her family nor the society. Even the destiny doesn't favour her. She is always punished and tortured by everyone around her. Elizabeth Jane daughter of Newson the sailor is one such example of the novel 'The Mayor of Casterbridge'. First she is loved and admired by her stepfather Henchard but the day he comes to know her real identity that she is not his real daughter. He shows all his frustration and failure in his life towards her. This shows his male dominance and proves him to be a selfish and unkind fellow, whom even circumstances could not change.

Conclusion:

The different scholars all over the world have interpreted Hardy's novels differently, and with the advancement and indictment of modern literary theories Hardy's novels need a new focus and vision of interpretation. The works of the novelist reflected the charm and majesty of contemporary society of the Victorian Period in which things and ideas were changing drastically. Hardy believed in his vision of changing the society, not the life of an individual because 'Destiny' played an important part.

Thomas Hardy's novels prove that he was able to germinate the ideology for supporting females in the age of Victorian Society. To understand his novels on the canon of the post modern studies, he has not put them on margins rather; the plots of his novels are witness of providing an ample space to female characters in the family, work place and society. He was daring enough to support the females as he did in creation of 'Tess' and 'Susan' who has been glorified characters and they shine forever in his novels. Thus, this discussion shall be one additional dimension of reading, interpreting, analysing and understanding of Thomas Hardy's major novels in the present changed global attitude. However, Literature remains universal, unchanged and full of jumbles to solve.

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