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A CRITICAL STUDY OF HARDY**Masuda Hasin**

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Abstract: Herein this article, a critical study of Thomas Hardy as a novelist has been discussed. Thomas Hardy was born on June, 1840, in the village of Upper Bockhamton, three mile away from Dorsetshire. His father was a master mason from whom he derived his love of music and his introduction to architecture. From his mother he inherited his inclination towards literature. The thatched cottage in which his parents lived stood on the western edge of Puddleton Heath, "a vast tract of unenclosed wild", which was to become a powerful influence upon his mind and to figure in his novels as Egdon Heath.

Keyword: Egdon Heath, Dorsetshire, unilluminated, needlessly frank.

INTRODUCTION:

That Hardy was great pessimist, that his novels were rigidly plotted to prove a pessimistic thesis, that they were needlessly frank, in their treatment of love and sex, that his style was uniformly gawky and ponderous, that he offered a dull, unilluminated and irrelevant routine of country life with its enormous ship-folds – these became the unquestioned and universal commonplace criticisms of Hardy's work. The positive elements of his fiction, those that make Hardy's novels a metaphorical account of historical changes as well as skilful and coherent stories of the cruel and mysterious nature of human destiny, began to receive critical attention only.

However, Hardy's essential genius has been discovered and explained in a variety of ways and his relevance to us today is proved by host of imaginative critics, as also by leading creative writers, like, Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Benjamin Britten, and John Fowls. Today he stands as one of the greatest English novelists. His once supposedly out-dated novels are being re-issued throughout the world and young people today find in him an interpreter and spokesman of their own despair, their own dream.

Regarding Hardy's view of life, it may be said that Hardy was not much interested in a final, philosophical explanation of life. His novels he pleaded were "impressions" and not "arguments". His fiction is an imaginative record of the passing-strange destinies, the concrete, experienced, awesome dreams of life he had seen or heard about. He was both a realist and a fatalist. The divisions of novels into sensational and anti-sensational did not make sense to him.

As regards the charge of pessimism against Hardy, he vehemently denied that he was a pessimist more than in one occasion. Moreover, it is false to see Hardy as essentially a pessimist, for he had a positive, poetic capacity which enabled him to celebrate life.

Man in Hardy's world is not the master of his Fate. He is variously circumscribed, opposed, and often no more than a bird in a springe. Man is a victim of circumstance or

Fate in Hardy's novels. His leading characters divide themselves into instruments for evil. All alike are striving for happiness; whereas Eustacia or Fitzpiers or Arabella strives for a selfish passion, Gabriel and Tess and Giles are prepared to sacrifice their own happiness to ensure that of other people and everything is happened by Fate.

In Hardy's novels, the beauty of nature of the green countryside popularly known as Wessex attracts the heroes and heroines and the other characters. But this outward beauty of nature indeed proves cruel and callous at the end of the stories of the plots and sub-plots in the novel. Man strives to become happy. But nature denies him happiness.

Fate in the novels of Hardy appears in different forms. Sometimes it appears as a natural force, sometimes as some innate weakness of character. Thus, Fate mainly appears in two guises in Hardy's novels – as chance, and as love, out of which chance is the most typical.

In the work of no other novelists chance exercises such a conspicuous influence on the course of events as in that of Hardy. Hardy has been blamed for this. But to condemn his use of chance is to misunderstand his view of life. There is always a battle between Man and Destiny in his works. Destiny is an inscrutable force; one does not understand its nature or its intentions. The working of Destiny always shows itself in the shape of inexplicable, unexpected blows of chance.

Again in the Hardy's novels, past actions of characters play a very important role. Many of Hardy's plots turn on the revelation of a past action coming to light after remaining secret for sometime. This happens in *A Pair Of Blue Eyes*, *Far From The Madding Crowd*, *The Return Of The Native*, *The Mayor Of Casterbridge*, and *Tess*. The past actions have become an instrument in the hands of Destiny, and Destiny uses this instrument against them and it is used with a ruthless indifference to their feelings.

The past actions are all connected with love and love is the second shape in which Hardy chiefly incarnates Fate. All of Hardy's novels are love stories. Love is the

predominating motive actuating his characters. Love is conceived by Hardy, as a blind, irresistible power seizing on human beings whether they will or not, intoxicating in its inception but bringing ruin in its wake.

The life of almost everyone in his novels except the thick-skinned rustics is wretched, miserable, a state almost of damnation.

The major undertaking of Hardy was the firm establishment of his imaginative world of Wessex – geography, landscape, folkways, agricultural pursuits, quaint peasantry – as a background for the drama of his main characters. Hardy's attitude to nature dominates his scene. Nature was to him a symbol of those impersonal forces of Fate with whom he shows mankind as being in a conflict. Not as a background, but as an actor in the play, Nature is always present, the incarnation of a living force with a will and purpose of its own, now and again taking an actual hand in the story.

Hardy rendered the sights and smells of the countryside with evocative sensuousness, or surrounded daily tasks with intimate tenderness. Hardy's Dorsetshire, for which he retained the old name of Wessex, is a land of old memoirs.

Nature is not just the background in his drama, but a leading character in it. Sometimes it exercises an active influence on the course of events, more often it is a spiritual agent, colouring the mode and shaping the disposition of human beings. Hardy shows a profound feeling or love for the heaths and pastures of Wessex. This feeling has little common with transcendental love of nature felt by poets like William Wordsworth and P.B. Shelley.

In Hardy, the Victorian Novelist, theory of tragedy receives a new treatment and careful handling. Hardy is not essentially a philosopher but he is a novelist with his peculiar attitude to Nature.

Hardy's novels make a deviation from the theme of the novels of Samuel Richardson with his sentimental novels, viz., *Clarissa Harlowe* and *Pamela* Henry Fielding's novels of comic epic in prose like *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones* and others. He also differs enormously from Charles Dickens who was essentially a writer of comedy with his treatment of humour and pathos in the novels like *Oliver Twist*, *Martin, A Tale of Two Cities*, *David Copperfield* and others.

Hardy differs much even from his contemporary novelists D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce. Hardy instead of dealing with the theme of "stream of consciousness", he stands massively from the others. There is a blend of theme and technique of the "Traditional" and the "Modern" as well as in the sense that in his prose narrative he is adopted in describing the minute details of the nature's picturesque beauty and simplicity of the characters with complex psychological insight into his creations.

Hardy's major novels are like apart from *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, *Desperate Remedies*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, *The Trumpet Major*. Then the two others *Tess* and *Jude* which are great epic novels that are concerned with the unfolding of the tragic history of a single life.

As for Hardy's use of tragic art, there is always a struggle between man and Fate or Destiny as different from the Shakespearean tragedy as also is different from the tragedies of Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes. The heroes and heroines in Hardy are different from the heroes and heroines of Shakespeare who are King, Queen, Prince, General and other persons of eminence. In Hardy, they are simpletons. Except, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, all other heroes and heroines are rustics. Men and women in Hardy are pitted against external forces of Nature. Henchard is too much obsessed with his hatred for Farfrae, while Bathsheba is obsessed with his thoughts of her beauty. The heroes and heroines think for simple life in the midst of nature and they are all attracted by the beauty of nature. They wished to live in nature's landscape beauty, but happiness is denied to them. The poetic philosophy of Hardy is peculiar to Hardy alone.

Thus Hardy's conception of life is essentially tragic and the conflict is the one in which there is no chance for escape. Man's scale is weighed by man's lack of foresight and he is unable to subordinate nature. There are the checks and shares of the Immanent Will which prove inevitable for them. Hardy's novels are always against injustices, an indictment and expose of injustices. In the last paragraph of the *Tess*, the novelist says that the President of Immortals who has had his sports with the heroine, i.e., *Tess* whose dreams are scattered.

Thus, it may be concluded that Hardy is the first among the English literatures to have properly employed the art of tragedy in his novels. Hardy, as a novelist will ever shine bright not only in English literature but also in the sphere of world literature.

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