

## CONFLICTING STATE OF ISSUES IN HARDY'S MAJOR NOVELS

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### ABSTRACT

*Thomas Hardy, a great Victorian novelist, made his fiction an instrument to launch a revolution against social injustice. He raised his voice against inequality with reference to class and gender. Though a considerable literary material is available on different aspects of Hardy's art but this article attempts to reveal those realms of Hardy's fiction which are not yet explored. His stories relate the issues such as gender, class, social evils and psychological disorders, etc. This paper aims to condemn the stereotypical relationship between community and individual with reference to Hardy's major novels. The paper deals with the relationships between individual and community, man and woman and upper and lower classes that are marked with clash in Hardy's novels. This article is an endeavor to explore the long-neglected features of Hardy's novels concerning the condemnation of inequality with reference to class and gender issues. His attitude towards modern civilization, class, gender is drenched with clash and conflict. In this way this paper is going to highlight that the clashes and conflicts being an inevitable part of social life are the characteristic features of human civilization. The present investigation has found that disorganization and disintegration within social order are the result of the continued neglect of conflicts.*

**KEY WORDS:** 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hardy's fiction, conflict perspective, social disorder.

### INTRODUCTION

The Victorian age, an age of great novel, witnessed great religious, social and political conflicts and analysts analyze that the conflicting state of issues within social community leave adverse effects on civilizations. To Joseph S. Himes, a society facing social conflicts is, "...rocked", "split" or "torn" by its internal conflicts "(Roudwick, 1971). A comprehensive study of Hardy's work reveals that social conflicts have a dual role to play. They, by causing disorder, sow the seeds for social change. John H. Bracey, too, highlights, "...the role of social conflict in bringing about social change" (Roudwick, 1971).

The nineteenth century English literature by the English novelists, including Hardy, is analyzed in the broad context of social change. While going through Hardy's major novels the paper will highlight the factors that provide evidence that there is an inevitable link between literature and the socio-economic aspects of the age, which influence it. In this regard Steven Connor remarks that, "...the processes of writing and reading novels are not fully distinct or finally distinguishable from the forms and processes of conflicts, deliberation and evaluation that belong to the social, economic or political realms." (Connor, 2001).

Hardy's novels concentrating upon certain dimensions revolve around the socio-economic condition of the late nineteenth century. His work provides evidence that opposition between individual and the rest of social order results in disorganization and dissatisfaction. Usually the individuals who belong to the specific social strata suffer from conflicting situations within social order. Hardy draws inspiration from such situations and projects them in his work. John Peck says that, "There must always be some sort of conflict going on in a work of literature." (Peck, 1995). Hardy's stories are drenched with conflicts and tensions inciting the readers to identify them in the text. His novels are the reflection of that conflicting socio-economic and religious milieu to which they belong.

Hardy's mind was influenced by the nineteenth century which was an age of socio-economic and religious conflicts that revealed the condition of the Victorian England. Hardy critically witnessed the crucial moment of his time and in the light of that he favored an ideal, social welfare state. He strongly revolted

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against the social stratification with in social structure. To him the polarization of society was contrary to the establishment of a social welfare state.

## REVIEW

The nineteenth century in the history of English Literature is recorded as an era of destruction and reconstruction because of conflicting state of issues. Walter E. Houghton catches the tone of the time when he defines it as, "...an age of "doubts, disputes, distraction, fears..."(Houghton,1957) The nineteenth century Victorian England experienced the crisis and collision with in social institutions as their doctrines were questioned and discarded whereas the new system had not yet been established . This situation found manifestation in the work of the Victorian writers including Hardy. Charles Dickens' novels, also, reflect the dilemma of the Victorian period. With reference to this we may quote the memorable lines from Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) where Dickens shows dualism with in social affairs in the nineteenth century in the following words. "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times."(Marshall,1968). These lines reflect the conflicting state of issues with in social order in the nineteenth century Victorian England.

The socio-economic condition of the time forms the mainstream of Hardy's art. The course of history and literary trends are being altered by such factors which are of great importance. The changing aura shaped the fate and future of evolving novel. Patricia Meyer Spacks also provides evidence in this regard in these words that, "Social changes impinged upon even helped to determine, the shape of the evolving novel. All eras, obviously, are marked by change ..." (Spacks,2006).

The Victorian age was an age of great invention that caused great changes in the society. The changing environment caused disturbance in the lives of the Victorian people and it became the theme of Hardy's and many other writer's fiction, for example, Matthew Arnold's poem *Dover Beach*, (1867), too, refers to that period of conflicting beliefs and ideologies. The poem throws light on the dual aspects of the nineteenth century while declaring it a period of invention and ennui simultaneously. According to the poem the Victorian period was marked by invention and turmoil. It, also, highlights the mental state of common people of the Victorian society who were deprived of certitude.

"Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and fight  
Where ignorant armies clash by night." (Houghton, 1957).

To critics the poem having symbolic significance refers to the Victorian age as a period of chaos. The phrase clash of armies is a reference to the English socio-political, economic and religious institutions which were marked with disputes, doubts, collisions and distractions. Hardy's novels revolve around the oppressor and oppressed with in class and gender. With reference to class conflict in Hardy's novels the sufferings of the lower masses are highlighted. Being a progressive minded writer Hardy advocates the cause of the women of labouring class.

## DISCUSSION AND ARGUMENT

Hardy's visual novels depict the current trends and the social environment prevalent around. Though Hardy's work has been analyzed by critics from many aspects yet marked with profundity, his work requires fresh evaluation opening up new vistas of thought. The focus of present research is upon the most important aspects of Hardy's art which need further investigation, mainly, his attitude towards modern developments, class distinction and gender. The study evaluates these issues with reference to clash and conflict with in social order. The aim and objective of the study is to analyze Hardy's novels from socio-economic and religious conflict perspective.

The present investigation reveals that Hardy being a socialist expressed his attitude towards modern civilization, class distinction and gender issues which are tinged with clash and conflict. The study explores that marked with duality Hardy's attitude towards modern civilization forms the mainstream of his art. The current research shows that he approves the modern mechanical advancements in life but disapproves them if they are of no benefit for the common man. The study highlights that social issues such as exploitation, inequality and injustice between the classes and genders can result in social turmoil.

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), with reference to the presence of conflicting state of issues in Hardy's novels, provides sufficient evidence. The story revolves around clash between traditional and modern and that is presented through the character of Michael Henchard and Donald Farfrae. Boris Ford says that in Hardy's novels we find, "... a clash between ancient and modern." (Ford, 1973). Henchard and Farfrae, simultaneously, represent old and new order. Henchard's defeat by Farfrae symbolizes the triumph of innovation against tradition. In the story, Henchard is shown as a man who relies on the ancient ways of life and Farfrae, however, is a man who is intrigued by modern modes of life. So, the conflict is between ancient and modern.

In the recent times Hardy as a case study is analyzed by the critics from different standpoint. The recent critical contribution on Hardy discards the earlier stereotypical criticism on his fiction as the latest criticism on Hardy highlights the Marxist, materialist or feminist issues. Hardy wanted to inculcate social awareness amongst the society and his first unpublished novel *The Poor Man and the Lady* according to critics is a socialistic novel. The novel projects the conflict between upper and lower classes. Ironically, it is revealed that the so-called social superiors are in reality moral inferiors. The novel projects the writer's sympathetic attitude towards the lower sections of the society. Critics find *The Poor Man and the Lady* and *Jude the Obscure* (1972) quite complementary to each other as they both condemn class distinction and social inequality. According to critics *Jude the Obscure*, a moral story, reflects the dark world populated by us. It is the story of a striving individual who is victimized by the social conventions. The same story is repeated in almost all the novels of Hardy. His stories often recount a vulnerable protagonist trapped in the web of rigid social system. In the before mentioned novel, the social setup is condemned by Hardy where hindrances such as inequality and injustice do not allow the individuals to discover their talents. Jude, who fails to achieve his goal, bursts in the following words that, "...it was my poverty and not my will that consented to be beaten. It takes two or three generations to do what I tried to do in one..." (Hardy, 1972).

Hardy highlights the lack of cooperation among the masses. He also hints that alienation of the individual from the community leads to individual loss. His novels deal with the clashes between individual and community. They also show that the individual is naturally dependent upon the community and they cannot survive if once detached from it. In his novels Hardy shows his doubt about the existence of God. The passages of his novels express his doubt about the religion. In this regard Donald Davie states that, "...for Hardy, as for many other nineteenth century writers, the loss of faith was an experience of the utmost consequence, not a mere frivolity or pretext for a wanton emotionalism" (Davie, 1972). Hardy's texts, containing profane views about sacred beliefs, are bitterly criticized and often labeled as blasphemous. Impious views about religion, colliding with the views of the community, isolate individuals from community. Religion in the modern world of latest developments including discoveries and inventions has a mere nominal role to play and has almost lost its influence on social affairs. Ultimately, the industrialized societies, because of their extremely materialistic and worldly concerns, are more secular than spiritual. In Hardy's novels the characters are more secular than devout Christians.

*Jude the Obscure* (1972), one of Hardy's later novels, is about Jude who is one of the main characters in the novel. He in the course of the story forms an illegitimate relationship with his cousin, namely, Sue Bridehead. Sue and Jude both, already married, Sue with Phillotson and Jude with Arabella, start to live together without legally getting married. Later in the novel Jude burns his theological books to get rid of dogma. Hardy disapproves such an attitude of Jude towards religion by showing his condition

that gets worse with the passage of time and this gives Hardy a chance to show that there is no chance of survival for a blasphemer. In this regard Hammer informs us that, "History in.... England was often praised specifically because it offered readers... "lively pattern"-that is, specific individual examples of human behavior that could be consciously imitated or shunned." (Hammer, 2008). Hardy by showing Jude's fall disapproves his behavior. This indicates a warning that such an attitude towards religion should be shunned by the individuals. Hardy, according to critics, has a complex approach towards religion and he is often blamed as an atheist or agnostic

The ideological, social and economic clashes remained the center of attention of the nineteenth century fiction. In this regard Pradhan states, "The world of fiction is often dominated by the clash and conflict..." (Pradhan, 2005). Hardy's tales are dominated by the opposing interests, ideas, persons and social classes. The present research concentrates upon Hardy's attitude towards modern civilization. The research attempts to investigate those aspects of writer's art which as a result of the socio-economic instability and injustice are marked with clash and conflict. His novels expose the dual nature of things. They include characters striving and longing for social improvement and those, who if luckily find a chance to improve their status, never get contentment. It is because we find in them the unchanging spirit of Wessex that usually revolts against innovation and cultivation.

Hardy's attitude towards modern civilization is full of clash and contradiction and in his novels, we find themes highlighting conflict between passion, reason and practical world. Jude wants to acquire higher education. But due to personal and non-personal reasons could not pursue the target. His failure is the result of the clash between his innate nature and the hostile atmosphere around. His first marriage with a woman of coarse manners proves to be a hasty attempt. It leaves a negative impact on his sensitive nature and results in conflicts both internal and external. Jude's could not get rid of Arabella and his wrong matrimonial decision results in a series of failures on his part. The conflict between a perceptive, ardent disposition and a vindictive, conservative world is the central theme of *Jude the Obscure*. Hardy's novels show that the modern mechanical advancements facilitating man sometime become source of inconvenience and reprobation. He intellectually favored advancement in all the fields of life but emotionally he was perturbed by change in the traditional way of life. He disapproves inequality in society especially with reference to the lower sections and women and bestows the women with special status in society. He is an advocate of female emancipation. The women, according to Hardy, are the victim of social and sexual vulnerability.

## CONCLUSION

Hardy's novel's exciting great debates discuss issues centralizing our lives. In them we find a river of ideas, impressions and images that flow from one brain which poignantly got affected by the age of conflicting beliefs, ideologies and theories. His fiction includes a variety of characters and through them he shows that how different moods and attitudes make or mar the existence. His motive was constructive as he wanted to ameliorate man and society. Hardy's novels concentrate upon social evils. This paper is an attempt to show that the remedy of all social evils, according to Hardy's novels, is the emergence of a socialist state. His novels project his vision of an ideal, welfare state. Hardy, in his fiction, while rejecting capitalism favors socialism which safeguards the right of common man. In a socialist state woman come forward to play their respective role for social welfare. According to Hardy in a socialist state the scale of conflict perspective is minimized as such state promotes collectivism and individual being an important member of society is never isolated. Hardy's vision of an ideal, socialist state was infact a desire to promote human welfare and according to Gennady Maltsev, "Socialist society, by virtue of its economic, political and ideological system, vests the concepts of social justice and human rights with profound humanity." (Maltsev, 1975).

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