



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Role Of Women And Female Sensibility In Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor Of The Casterbridge*

Dr. Ravi Bellad
Guest Faculty
Government First Grade
College, Dharwad

Abstract

Feminism, originating in the West, is a global belief in social, economic, and political equality for women. Throughout Western history, women were confined to domestic spheres, with public life reserved for men. In medieval Europe, women were denied property ownership, study, and participation in public life. In France, they were still required to cover their heads in public, and in parts of Germany, husbands could sell their wives. Even in the early 20th century, women could not vote or hold elective office in Europe and most of the United States. They were also prevented from conducting business without a male representative, and married women could not control their children without their husband's permission. Women had limited access to education and were barred from most professions. These restrictions continue to exist in some parts of the world today.

This Article explores Thomas Hardy's feminist perspective in books such as *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, by talking about the portrayal of the main female characters in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *Far From the Madding Crowd*, among other books, and the author's critique of patriarchal hegemony and the mindset towards customs around marriage. Women were viewed as second sex in Victorian culture. They fell prey to patriarchal hegemony. A patriarchal social structure is one in which men dominate in positions of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and property ownership. To define, develop, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes is the shared objective of a variety of political groups, philosophies, and social movements together referred to as feminism. This involves working to provide women the same access to professional and educational opportunities as males. Feminism's primary goal is to refute the idea that men rule women. We require a shift in both genders in order to achieve equality between men and women.

A socially created concept of men and women is called gender. It is not the same as women or sex (the biological traits that distinguish men and women). The duties, responsibilities, and tasks that are assigned to men and women in society, as well as in both public and private spheres, define gender. The male must lessen sexual harassment, abuse, wife-selling, wife-beating, and suppression of women.

Key words : Feminist, Women, sensibility, Thomas Hardy, sessex and Lucetta Templeman

Thomas Hardy was an English novelist and poet who grew up in Wessex, a county in southwestern England. Born in 1840, he was the eldest of four children of a stonemason and jobbing builder. Hardy received a good grounding in mathematics and Latin from his early experiences in rural life. He apprenticed with local architect John Hicks and later moved to London to work as a draftsman. Hardy abandoned his early ambitions of a university education and eventual Anglican priest in the mid-1860s due to lack of funds and declining religious faith. Instead, he focused on the reading of poetry and developing his own poetic skills. Hardy's first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, was influenced by Wilkie Collins' "sensation" fiction. His next novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, was based on their courtship and featured a wild Cornish setting. Hardy's break from architecture occurred in 1872 when he contributed to Tinsley's Magazine with *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. His resulting novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, introduced Wessex for the first time and made him famous for its agricultural settings and blend of humorous, melodramatic, pastoral, and tragic elements.

Thomas Hardy, a renowned novelist, married Emma Gifford in 1874 and initially moved around, living in London and Dorset. His novels, such as *The Hand of Ethelberta* and *The Return of the Native*, were criticized for their social commentary on the British class system. Hardy's next works included *The Trumpet-Major*, *A Laodicean*, and *Two on a Tower*. He moved to Wimborne and Dorchester, where he established himself as a member of the professional middle class.

Hardy's novels, such as *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Woodlanders*, explored socioeconomic issues and the loss of life. His short-story collections included *Wessex Tales*, *A Group of Noble Dames*, *Life's Little Ironies*, and *A Changed Man*. His late novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, are considered his finest. These novels, though technically from the 19th century, anticipate the 20th century in terms of their subject matter. *Tess* questions societal sexual mores and challenges the class-ridden educational system, while *Jude the Obscure* challenges conventional morality. Hardy's sensitivity to hostile reviews partly precipitated his transition from fiction to poetry.

Thomas Hardy, a renowned poet, ranked poetry above fiction. His first significant public appearance as a poet, *Wessex Poems* (1898), included verse written during his years as a novelist and revised versions of poems dating from the 1860s. His style remained consistent throughout his career, with no clear line of development from immaturity to maturity. Hardy's poetry ranged from lyric to meditation, ballad, satirical vignette, and dramatic monologue or dialogue.

In 1903, 1905, and 1908, Hardy published *The Dynasts*, a huge poetic drama that was mostly in blank verse and subtitled "an epic-drama of the War with Napoleon." *The Dynasts* projected Hardy's central vision of a universe governed by the purposeless movements of a blind, unconscious force called the Immanent Will.

"The ruin of good men by bad wives, and more particularly, the frustration of many a promising youth's high aims and hopes and the extinction of his energies by an early imprudent marriage.. " (*The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p6)

In the above quotation, Henchard discusses his desire to sell his wife and the impact of early marriage on his character. Hardy highlights the Victorian Era's dismal attitude towards marriage and women, as well as the nonchalant reactions of those who witnessed the auction. Henchard's impulsiveness and questioning of the wisdom of men in the fruity tent, such as Susan, lead him to sell his wife to Richard Newson. This demonstrates Henchard's "bitterest temper" and his impulse to sell his wife. Hardy contrasts this behavior with the affection displayed by the horses waiting to be auctioned, which evokes a sense of empathy and question the superiority of the human race. The horses' auction prompted Henchard to think of auctioning his wife, while Henchard chose to drown his senses in alcohol and exercise the right to dominate and abuse women. The mute animals' gentleness questions the superiority of the human race.

As Elaine Showalter says,

"The Mayor of Casterbridge begins with a scene that dramatizes the analysis of female subjugation as a function of capitalism..."

In Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the story revolves around Michael Henchard, a tragic hero who is portrayed as a blindly simple man. The novel follows the lives of three women: his wife Susan, his daughter Elizabeth-Jane, and his betrothed, Lucetta. Elizabeth-Jane is the closest to being the heroine, as she desires to improve herself by becoming a woman of wider knowledge, higher repute, and willingness to sacrifice her personal comfort and dignity to the common weal. However, her passiveness in the face of Henchard's cruelty and her willingness to be replaced by Lucetta in Farfrae's affections are characteristic emblems of what Patricia Spacks sees as the conversion of the feminine capacity for suffering into a feminine role for suffering.

Hardy believes that the best qualities in the face of life can be found in Elizabeth-Jane, who is as familiar with the wreck of each day's wishes as the diurnal setting of the sun. Her humorousness in the face of pain, sense that life is less a series of pure disappointments than a series of substitutions, and her practice of making limited opportunities endurable reveal the best qualities anyone can possess, man or woman.

Lucetta Templeman is portrayed as a victim of the scandal that arises over their being "careless of appearances." She is in constant fear of being exposed, and her only escape is marriage to Henchard. Falling in love with Farfrae, she struggles with the conflicts between her own desires and the strictures of society. Forced by Henchard to agree to marry him, she secretly marries Farfrae, further compromising her position and leaving her prisoner to Henchard's discretion with regard to their letters.

Lucetta's behavior is condemned by Henchard, Elizabeth-Jane, and Farfrae, and she fears that she will be condemned by Henchard as well. The locals parade the effigies of Henchard and Lucetta past her house, leading to her death. Lucetta fails in her attempts to resist the passive role society places on her.

Susan Henchard reveals a passivity in relationship carried to the extremes of masochism, yet within that passivity exercises a power that helps lead to the fall of her husband. Patricia Spacks writes of women who seek misery not as an end in itself but as a necessary means to self-assertion. When Henchard is finally reunited with his wife, she will not forgive him, and her "honesty in dishonesty" obliterates the forgiveness for Henchard. Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* explores the complex relationships between three women, including Elizabeth-Jane, Susan Henchard, and Lucetta Templeman.

Hardy's novels are centered around the struggles, conditions, and suffering of women. He has witnessed women subjugating themselves from a young age and has seen poverty in his own life. He believes that rich class men have no respect for women, as they are considered commodities with no ambition or reputation. In his novels, Hardy depicts the struggles and sufferings of women, such as Tess in *The D'Urbervilles*, where she is rejected by her husband Angel Clare due to her past.

In the novel *Mayor of the Casterbridge*, the problems and sufferings of a woman are clearly shown. Susan Hanchard, the wife of Michael Hanchard, suffers due to her husband's rigid treatment of her. Michael sells her intoxicated and refuses to listen to Susan's pleas for forgiveness. Susan tries to control him, but Michael remains rigid and unresponsive.

Patriarchy is also a cause of women's suffering. Men always want to dominate women, and Susan is seen as a puppet or toy in the hands of men. Social morality, a man-made way of life, is created by male-dominated societies. It is a hypocrisy that creates many problems for individuals, and it is made by the powerful group of society. However, the makers of society do not follow it honestly, making rules for the society, country, and lower class people but not for themselves.

Susan's back to Casterbridge with her daughter Elizabeth is another example of social morality. She does not gain a great reputation in society and becomes a mayor despite being a hay-trusser. When she reaches the town, she is surprised to see the crowd around him, wondering if he will not take as warmly to his own kin. As he steps forward towards the mayor, she sees a board hanging there, symbolizing the power of social

morality over women. Hardy's novels highlight the struggles and sufferings of women and the importance of understanding and respecting the rights and well-being of women.

Lucetta, a woman who has suffered at the hands of conservative Victorian society, is a victim of the harsh treatment she endured. Her brief affair with Henchard in New Jersey cost her reputation, character, and eventually her chance at a happy life. Despite inheriting property from her deceased aunt, Lucetta Le Sueur transforms into Lucetta Templeman, who now lives at the prestigious High Place Hall in Casterbridge. She is bestowed with all the essential ingredients of a respectable lady, but she is under the impression that marriage to Henchard can be redeemed for her sins.

Lucetta initially attempts to renew her connection with Henchard by sending him letters and through her friendship with Elizabeth-Jane. She is convinced that only Henchard can free her from the ghosts of the past and that he is her only chance at a respectable life. This represents how women had been inured to accept the victimization they were subjected to by Patriarchal forces and the immense internalization of the emancipation, where it was only through men that women could achieve any semblance of happiness.

Lucetta's fear of public exposure of her relations with Henchard is what destroys her. She realizes that marrying Henchard for the sake of her history with him would be a mistake, as neither is she poor and dependent as she was before, nor is she particularly fond of him as she detests his hot temper. She is now a much better judge of character as she knows that Henchard wishes to marry her out of a sense of charity.

The skimmity ride organized by Joshua Jopp and some townsfolk to publicly criticize adultery shows the detrimental impact of redundant traditions that seek to humiliate without consideration. Lucetta's loss of social validation triggers her seizures, causing her to lose both her unborn child and eventually her life. On her death bed, Lucetta reveals the entire truth to Farfrae, to which Farfrae's reaction is full of disdain.

While many believe that Lucetta suffers for the crimes of her past and that the skimmity ride is part of her Karma as a characterless woman, what most fail to see is that Lucetta was simply a woman who is made to pay the cost of love each time she tries to seek happiness. Her affair with Henchard tainted her reputation irreparably, forcing her to reject Henchard and sowing the seeds for further turmoil. Lucetta was a victim of the times, which denied women the right to love and happiness. She lived and died for love, demonstrating the harsh treatment she faced in society.

Works Cited

- Hardy, Thomas. The mayor of Casterbridge. OUP Oxford, 2004
- Gregor, Ian. The Great Web: The form of Hardy's Major Fiction. London: Faber and Faber, 1974. Printed.
- Showalter, E. (1985). The female malady. Women, madness and English culture. New York, Pantheon Books.
- Showalter, Elaine. "The Unmanning of the Mayor of Casterbridge." Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1988. Pp. 53-68.
- <http://tlhjournal.com/uploads/products/33.aruna-rayalu-article.pdf>
- <https://oaji.net/articles/2017/-1535975583.pdf>

