

Thomas Hardy and Vision of Life

Thomas Hardy was the last great novelist of the Victorian age, though his works as a poet and a story writer covers a few years of the twentieth century. He began his career as a novelist at the instance of his wife Emma, who wanted to see her husband's name blazing in letters of gold in the galaxy of British novelists. Acting according to his wife's wishes, Hardy launched on the unexplored region of novel writing and achieved eminent success in his art. Hardy's first experiment in novel writing was an utter failure and his two early works *The Poor Man and Lady* and *Desperate Remedies* were condemned in severe terms by George Meredith. He received instructions from the sagacious master in the technique of plot-construction, and his later works were acclaimed as successful experiments in fiction writing.

Hardy's attitude towards life is essentially tragic and pessimistic. He ranks with those whom life is by no means a boon. His entire outlook towards life can be summed up in a few words. In "The Mayor of Casterbridge" he says, "Happiness is but an occasional episode in a general drama of pain." In this connection Baker remarks, "He was an extremely sensitive temperament, rather given to melancholy, easily moved to tears, fond of solitude, though by no means inaccessible to good fellowship and enjoying a good laugh as much as anyone, especially if the joke was a profane or sardonic character. All his life he had a weakness for gruesome incidents, grim legends, creepy stories, accounts of spells, omens, ghosts, murders, suicide and the like." Hardy was much affected by his environment. Several influences worked effectively in the formation of his impression about life. Hardy's physical ill-health, the morbidity

of his temper, and his general inclination towards the funeral side of things determined his melancholy and pessimistic outlook and impressions about life.

Hardy's vision of life is certainly not very attractive and glamorous. He came across despair, dejection, failure, frustration in human life. He noticed plenty of tragedy in the life of Wesssex people who were poor, dependent and ignorant. He found them exposed to the oppressions of the social system, the caprice of weather and "The President of Immortals" every now and then undoing their lives. This is what Hardy saw, and this is what is actually presented in his novels. His attitude towards life is pessimistic and gloomy in the sense that almost in all his tragic novels like *Tess*, *Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Jude the Obscure* and *The Return of the Native* we come across picture of despair and dejection, of hopes unfulfilled and plans uncarried out. Man proves feeble before chance, fate or destiny that so often comes to vitiate man's plans and schemes. Hardy considers men and women as mere puppets in the hands of a mocking fate which is relentless in its blind justice. He believes in Omar Khayyam's lines about destiny:

"The moving finger writes: and having writ
moves on: nor all thy piety nor wit
shall lure it back to cancel half a line
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it."

Again and again, in Hardy's novels we view the spectacle of misery and suffering for human beings. Man proposes and God disposes stands true in all his works. This attitude towards life is being presented by Hardy through the character of Henchard in 'The Mayor of Casterbridge' where the mayor struggles and fights against the decree of fate throughout his life though he ultimately meets his tragic end.

Hardy is not for intellectual coward and invalids. His pessimism will be depressing to those who are morally and intellectually

incapable of standing shocks in life. He is a sturdy realist who takes life at its face value and what actually is the state of affairs in the world. He considers it simply wish-fulfilment to indulge in cheap Optimism, when the forces of evil, sadness and despair overpower us on all sides. It is foolish and unwise for anybody to be an optimist when he sees the conditions of life in a realistic and faithful light. Such is the realistic vision of life unfolded by Hardy in his novels.