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Women as Second Citizens in the Patriarchal Society with Reference to Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*

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Abstract

Women today are determined to realise their full potential capacity and are ready to fight with anything that comes on their way. Today, the position of women in society has changed radically because of 'Feminist Movement'. Feminism is by definition is a movement to gain equal rights for women with the man in social, political and economic fields. 'Feminism' means the woman being feminine what are difficulties she faces and suffers at the hands of man as well as in society.

Key Words: Feminism, Patriarchal Society, Domination of man

The aim of this paper is to do in depth study of Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, its protagonist Eustacia Vye, her female, feminine and feminist qualities which lead her to ultimate destination.

Women are the integral part of human civilization. No society or country can ever progress without an active participation of women in its overall development. Although the place of women in society differs from culture to culture and from age to age; yet one fact is common to almost all the societies that women have never been equal to man; they are oppressed, suppressed and subjected by men. In the matter of sharing their lives with her husband every woman is slave for the sake of her family, her husband and children. The woman plays various important roles in the society- a mother, a wife, a daughter, and a sister like a machine in a family, but she never claims for her life to be her. This is due to the prevailing patriarchal society, where the authenticity emanates from the eldest male in the family. In the male dominated

society, the inflated male tends to dominate and neglect the female, though she is the partner of his life. Society characterises woman as an ideally warm, gentle, dependant and submissive. Family life and work patterns convey the idea that, women should be submissive, subordinate and dependant on man. She is the mother of man who subsequently rules over her and wants to protect her, and to keep her under his control.

Day and night women must be kept in subordination to the males
of the family; in childhood of the father, in youth, to her husband;
in old age to her sons.....even though the husband be destitute
of virtue and seeks pleasure as where he must be worshipped as a God.(1)

The first voice in favour of women's right in west was in fact raised much earlier. The first major Feminist Manifesto, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792, was written by Mary Wollstonecraft, who demanded equal opportunities for women in the field of education, economics and politics. An

attack on the social and economic system. *A Vindication* strongly pleaded for women education and their protection by law. *A Vindication* was the first document where the full humanity of woman is asserted and her author insists upon its recognition.

Feminism is an expression of resentment against the unjust treatment meted out to women. It is the expression of the refusal of women to be treated as a doormat or a piece of furniture meant for convenience of man. Feminism intends to rebel against the hostile environment in which a woman is forced to live. It is a struggle against hardships, neglect and dual moral standards to which women are subjected. Feminism asks why women have played a subordinate role to man in human society. It is concerned with how women's lives have changed throughout the history, and it asks 'what about women experience?' It is different from men's either as a result of an essential or ontological or psychological difference or as a result of historical imprinting and social construction. Feminist literary criticism studies literature by women for how it addresses or expresses the women's lives and experiences. And it also studies the male-dominated canon in order to understand how men have used culture to further their domination on women.

Thomas Hardy is one of the foremost literary figures of England. He has written novels, which have earned him great lasting reputation. He has composed poetry which has earned him great and lasting reputation. As with most of the great novelists, love also is the central theme in the novels of Thomas Hardy. Almost all his novels are primarily love-stories. Hardy presents love as a compulsive passion. Man and woman fall in love whether they

will or not and their emotional relations are psychologically analysed.

Hardy's *The Return of the Native* which was published in 1878. It is the major novel of Hardy. Wildeville is the hero of the novel. He is an engineer who becomes a publican. He plays fast and loose with two women who love him. They are Thomas Yeobright and Eustacia Vye. The farmer is gentle and unselfish and the later is selfish and capricious. To spite Eustacia Vye, Damon Wildeville marries Thomas Yeobright who reflects love suit of her humble lover Diggory Venn. Thomas' cousin Clym Yeobright is a diamond merchant in Paris. He is fed up with his profession and returns to Egdon Heath for a becoming village school master. He falls in love with Eustacia Vye and intention to marry her. Eustacia tries to retain her husband Paris, but Clym's sight fails and he becomes a furze-cutter. Eustacia's frustration and despair are understandable. She becomes instrumental between his mother and husband consequently his mother dies. And revelation of her illicit relation with Damon Wildeville becomes cause of violent between them. Eustacia Vye ultimately elopes with Damon and both are drowned in their flight. Clym holds himself responsible for the death of his mother and wife and becomes an itinerant preacher. Thomason Yeobright in her turn marries in her farmer humble admirer Diggory Venn.

There are female, feminine and feminist qualities in Eustacia Vye. She is warm, very beautiful, and charming girl presented in the novel. The memorable portrait of Eustacia Vye which Hardy builds up in chapter VII of *The Return of the Native* leads to her a certain splendour and glory to which her actions, behaviour, and

utterances subsequently do not conform. She does not, in the course of Hardy's narrative, touch the heights to which Hardy elevates her in his description of her character and personality.

Physically Eustacia is described as "full-limbed and somewhat heavy; without ruddiness, as without puller, and soft to the touch as a cloud".(2) To see her hair is to fancy that a whole winter does not contain darkness enough to form its shadow. She has pagan eyes full of nocturnal mysteries. Her mouth seems formed less to speak than to quiver, less to quiver than to kiss. Some might have added less to kiss than to curl. So fine the lines of her lips that, though full, each corner of her mouth is as clearly cut as the point of a spear. Her presence brings memories of such things as Bourbon roses, rabies and tropical midnights; her moods recall lotus-eaters and the march in "Athalie"; her voice one of a musical instrument.

Feminism is the movement which generates the awareness of women for their rights and it studies the suffering of woman in the hands of man as well as society. Mostly married women are the slaves of their husbands they are getting only second position in the family. There is no importance of a woman in front of man. Their husbands are treating them like a machine or a caretaker for family as compare to their life partner. And she is getting only second citizenship in the society. How could there be any good in a woman everybody spoke ill of? In the most emotionally charged scene between husband and wife in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, Clym Yeobright thus finally succumbs to the view of Eustacia Vye's identity that has been constructed by public surveillance and conjecture.

Deemed a witch, temptress and even a murderess by the voice of the social "everybody", Eustacia is liable to the terms of such judgement, the consequence of which are most obviously literalized in her suicide by drowning. Yet punishment itself also definitively shapes to confirm social interpretation, unequivocally defining her as it confirms the conclusions drawn by public speculation and gossip, punishment is shown to be inextricably linked to observation and utterance.

The tension in *The Return of the Native* between self-inflicted and socially-enacted discipline thus deserves examination. While critical attention has frequently been given to "that socially approved method of subordinating women; the inculcation of guilt" (3) that Hardy's novels expose, the very way in which social discipline is applied is equally significant. *The return of the Native* is particularly revealing in regards to Hardy's view of the capacity of speculation and blame to shape public identity and induce self-destruction. *The Return of the Native*, where ongoing physical and emotional torment leads ultimately to self-destruction, where the social readings of the heroine lead to her rewrite her plot in accordance with the identity that such readings have constructed.

The feminine quality that she loved by everyone. She wants to be a loveable person. To be loved to madness this is Eustacia's great desire. Love is to be her one-tonic which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed too long for the observation called passionate love more than for any particular lover. Fidelity in love for fidelity's sake had less attraction for her than for most women. She feels that a

blaze of love, even if it gets soon extinguished, was better than the dim light of a lantern even if it were to last many years. Her loneliness deepened her desire. She felt that destiny was cruel towards her. She suffered much from a depression of spirits, and took long slow walks to recover them.

Like every woman she is more conscious about her look and dignity. Just because of that she suffers from the fault of her pride and vanity. She is not only conscious of her physical attractions but demands a recognition and acknowledgment of the fact that she is beautiful. This is the quality of a female desire. For instance, when Wildeve meets her after having failed to marry Thomason on the first occasion, Eustacia throws back the shawl which she is wearing and, revealing her face and throat, she asks him with a smile if he has seen anything better than that in the course of his travels. A little later she tells him that she had lighted the bonfire in order to test her power over him that she had little excitement by summoning him and enjoying a feeling of triumph over him. When the reddleman urges her not to come between Thomason and Wildeve, her reply is fully characteristic of her and shows her pride

and vanity. She gives vent to her feelings of jealousy and resentment by saying that Wildeve was hers before he became Thomason's and that he likes her (Eustacia) best. "I will not be beaten down by an inferior woman like her". (4) She says with reference to Thomason's desire to marry Wildeve. She becomes almost arrogant towards the reddleman when she says: "But I lose all self-respect in talking to you". (5) We also learn here that Eustacia does not feel much concerned

about people's opinion regarding her. The possibility of her getting a bad name by her association with Wildeve has no terror for her: "she was unconcerned at that contingency as a goddess at a lack of linen. As far as social ethics were concerns Eustacia approached the savages state, though in emotion she was all the while an epicure".(6) Nor does she wish to lose her independence for the sake a shifting to a more congenial environment. Though she longs to live in a city, she would not like to go to Budmouth if she has to satisfy the whims of a woman who would hire her service.

Not only is Eustacia vain and proud, but she is also self-willed and, to some extent, reckless. We see her reckless nature when, under the stress of her passion, she disguises herself as boy in order-to-be able to go to Clym's house and take a look at him. She finds it "a charmingly adventurous way" to see the man. Eustacia's passions. Says Hardy, "are of massive rather than the vivacious kind. Nor does she feel afraid of the consequences even if her identity becomes known during the performance of the play "the fact only could be detected, her true motive never". Reckless through she is, we are much impressed by her self-confidence, boldness, and daring. Her sex becomes known to two or three of the summers, but she does not lose her nerve and performs her role competently and ably. Having seen Clym, she falls in love with Thomason, Thomason with him. She now repents of having been sole extent responsible for not allowing Wildeve's marriage with Thomason to materialise. Wildeve now appears insignificant to her, and she wishes that he were married to Thomason. All this shows that Eustacia,

like Wildeve himself, is a woman of fluctuating desires.

There is no doubt that Eustacia Vye is the heroine of the tragedy. *The Return of the Native* without the majestic air that Miss Vye adds to the novel we are left with a typical period soup drama. Eustacia Vye is no more than one occasion compared to classical characters of Greek mythology and even in her death the nobility of her figure evokes images of classical sculpture.

The almost Godly representation of character juxtaposes the 'rebellious adolescent' image that is created by Eustacia' pathetic attempts at passion and love. This serves as a direct comparison between Eustacia and Egdon Heath, just as the heath seems simple and unappealing but is full of underlying Majesty, such is the character of the heroine only opposite.

Eustacia Vye is perhaps one of Hardy's most alluring, fascinating and, to some extent, real, female characters. She has all

the qualities of female, feminine and feminist. She is self-made, aware of her rights, position in society. But at the same time she is having the heart of a woman, she committed suicide. She is not the native, innocent Tess, nor is she the troubled and intelligent but ultimately tragic Sue Brideshead. Eustacia Vye is extremely complex, at times shallow and dependant, at other times almost unworldly in her command of her surroundings and the way in which she likes of Charles Dickens simply did not. It is not within my scope here to attempt to find a definition of feminism or feminist thinking, but it is my belief that within the confines of the 19th century, and in spite of any occurrences in his own personal life. Hardy was (and to some extent, remains) a champion of the female cause. In *The Return of the Native*, Hardy presents a complicated and enthralling character in Eustacia Vye in other words, a genuine woman as opposed to an idealised one.

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