

PAIN AS A PRIVILEGE: A STUDY OF HARDY'S *THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE**Yovanna. C., Research Scholar, Coimbatore, TN, India**Dr. S. Kalamani, Professor, Department of English, School of Arts and Social Sciences
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Coimbatore- 641043***Abstract:**

*Pain is inevitable for human beings. Man, down the ages has repeatedly questioned the cause for pain and suffering. The Victorian Age experienced a transition in its science, technology and most importantly, its beliefs. The Age awakened England to new thought and reasoning. The instilling of new ideas and beliefs also caused the people to be perplexed. Thomas Hardy portrays the crises faced by the Victorians, contemplating and questioning different ideas and beliefs. Hardy, in his works, bestows great emphasis and importance on nature and its character. Nature, is believed to guide, teach, warn, punish and chasten those that come in contact with it. The article seeks to explore the question of pain and suffering based on Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Pain is considered a privilege and an evidence of love and compassion in this selfish world.*

Keywords: *Pain, Suffering, Nature, Free-will, Love.*

The Age of freedom, science and awakening, the Victorian era brought to England a transformation that it had not seen over the centuries. Its scientific and technical development, its growth in population and abundance of resources caused the people of the time to be self-sufficient. They believed and professed that they could control both man and nature. The important transition in the Victorian Age is recorded by Jerome Hamilton Buckley, in his essay, *Victorianism*. "The Victorian Age as a whole was forced to adapt itself to new values as old tradition crumbled; and the term "Victorian" is, therefore, egregiously abused when invoked to describe attitudes that the Victorians inherited, modified or discarded" (8).

The nineteenth century in England witnessed the birth of new theories. Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer and Thomas Henry Huxley among many others shook the foundations of faith and religion. In *The Origin of Species* published by Charles Darwin in 1859 suggested that all vegetative and animal forms of life have evolved from other primitive forms by biological evolution. Herbert Spencer brought forward the theory, 'survival of the fittest' based on Darwin's theory of evolution. Plato suggested that every living form is created by keeping eternal ideas and forms as patterns in the mind. Modernism became a prop on which the western civilization abandoned its religious morals and standards. The people of the Victorian Age, walked away from their love for liberty, old standards of marriage, honour and compassion for the weak and embraced destruction of the unborn, promoted alcohol among the youth, and gave themselves to sexual perversion, marital unfaithfulness and adultery due to which values decreased day by day. The period of Enlightenment highlighted the ability of the human mind to comprehend that which otherwise would need supernatural revelation. Alister. E. McGrath speaks of the Enlightenment period in his book, *Christian Theology*.

The movement is perhaps best seen as a reaction against certain of the central themes of the Enlightenment, most notably the claim that reality can be known to human reason. It protested against any reduction of reality to a series of rationalized simplicities. Instead, Romanticism made an appeal to the human imagination, which it held to be capable of

providing a synthesis of the complexities and tensions which it observed in nature and in human feelings (70).

Thomas Hardy, born in the Victorian Age, abandoned his Christian faith and upbringing for the budding theories of the age. Hardy's novels are all set in the fictional place, Wessex. Hardy's knowledge of the seasons and calamities of nature can be noticed vividly in his works. Across the years, critics have registered that Hardy has extensively recorded the change that England witnessed, from being rural and agricultural to adapting to modernism. Hardy portrayed rural life as it was during which industrialization took over England. The suffering and anguish of the rural community is seen in Hardy's novels. Their struggle to adapt themselves to industrialization also influenced their beliefs. One can see that Hardy's stream of thought through his novels was to find an answer to this suffering that his very own rural community faced at the dawn of a new era which put an end to many people's livelihood. Hardy, to the very end of his life was seen trying to solve this puzzle but never succeeded; nor did he adapt to the new changes in England. Dr. Ganpat Rai, in his book, *Thomas Hardy's Realism and Pessimism*, says, "There is a strong sense of the relationship between Hardy's novels and the social and economic history of Victorian rural England" (139). Dr. Ganpat Rai also points out the superiority of Hardy over the other writers by talking about the nuances found in Hardy's works:

There has never been a novelist so sensitive to impressions of sight and hearing, one who renders them with so much precision and at the same time with such regard for the total aesthetic effect of the scene or object rendered, its harmonious relation to the emotions involved. The appeal is threefold; to our sense of reality, to our sense of beauty and to our sympathetic emotions; and such a combination, so rare if not unique in fiction, is what gives Hardy his superiority over many novelists with greater endowments in other directions. (139-140)

Hardy used 'nature' to represent the harsh realities of life. Egdon Heath is the centre of the plot in *The Return of the Native* published in 1878. According to William R. Rutland, *The Return of the Native* is artistically the most perfect of Hardy's novels (68). John Holloway in his article, *Hardy's Major Fiction*, remarks that the end of the novel is half-tragic but that Hardy would have intended it to be more tragic (269). In Hardy's novel, *The Return of the Native*, the characteristics of Egdon Heath is compared to the character and behaviour of man his virtues and vices:

It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities. (6)

A heath, generally, is considered an infertile shrubland; it is no of use to anyone. However, Hardy gives to Egdon Heath an almost mystical and supernatural power, where the heath has the capacity to build or ruin one's life. Hardy considers civilization, the heath's enemy:

The untamable, Ishmaelite thing that Egdon now was it always had been. Civilization was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetation its soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular formation. In the venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human vanity in clothes. A person on a heath in raiment of modern cut and colours has more or less an anomalous look. We seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive. (6)

Egdon Heath provides repose or a sort of relaxation to people that awakens one's senses to tranquility. While rural life is considered stagnant by many from the nineteenth century to the present day, Hardy considers it a repose:

To do things musingly, and by small degrees, seemed, indeed, to be a duty in the Egdon valleys at this transitional hour, for there was that in the condition of the heath itself which resembled protracted and halting dubiousness. It was the quality of the repose appertaining to the scene. This was not the repose of actual stagnation, but the apparent repose of incredible slowness. A condition of healthy life so nearly resembling the torpor of death is a noticeable thing of its sort; to exhibit the inertness of the desert, and at the same time to be exercising powers akin to those of the meadow, and even of the forest, awakened in those who thought of it the attentiveness usually engendered by understatement and reserve. (12)

Nature provides the slowness that is required to reflect and introspect one's self and those around. It has a way of giving revelations to man whereby he can know his worth, shortcomings and character. It causes one to rejoice, to repose, to mourn loss, to overcome grief and thus, it becomes the cornerstone and enables man in the process of his moulding. In Hardy's novels nature reflects the characters' mind and vice versa. The characters and nature are in harmonious communion and never once do the rustics go against the forces of nature. Never once does any character, win against nature in spite of the influence of modernism. Those going astray are embraced by Nature and offered the means of correction. Egdon Heath is depicted in such a way that it would be a place, an ascetic or monk would love to live and muse:

The most thorough-going ascetic could feel that he had a natural right to wander on Egdon: he was keeping within the line of legitimate indulgence when he laid himself open to influences such as these. Colours and beauties so far subdued were, at least, the birthright of all. Only in summer days of highest feather did its mood touch the level of gaiety. Intensity was ore usually reached by way of the solemn than by way of the brilliant, and such a sort of intensity was often arrived at during winter darkness, tempests, and mists. Then Egdon was aroused to reciprocity; for the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend. Then it became the hoe of strange phantoms; and it was found to be hitherto unrecognized original of those wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster, and are never thought of after the dream till revived by scenes like this. (5)

In the novel, Mrs. Yeobright is portrayed as a woman of high social standing who prefers to maintain a distance between the heath folk and herself. Her solitude and estrangement is an attribute of the heath itself. She is a reflection of her surroundings. Thomasin Yeobright on the other hand, is introduced as recovering from her disappointment. Thomasin's disappointment lies in Wildeve, her fiancé, who has an affair with a woman named Eustacia Vye. Hardy describes her condition: "The groundwork of the face was hopefulness; but over it now lay like a foreign substance a film of anxiety and abstracted nothing of the bloom, and had as yet but given a dignity to what it might actually undermine" (41). Wildeve does not seem to have got over the power of Eustacia's beauty and does not proceed with his marriage to Thomasin. Wildeve is one with a "lady-killing career" though no woman would find anything in him to dislike him. Eustacia Vye is described as close to a demi god by Hardy:

Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, had she handles the distaff; the spindle, and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government. There would have been the same inequality of lot, the same heaping up of favours here, of contumely there, the same generosity before justice, the same perpetual dilemmas, the same captious alternations of caresses and blows that we endure. (75)

Eustacia's native is Budmouth. She is the daughter of a bandmaster of a regiment. Her mother is the daughter of a captain. The bandmaster made his permanent home in England and took great trouble to

provide for his family. Other expenses were defrayed by Eustacia's maternal grandfather. After the death of Eustacia's mother, her father drinks himself to death. The girl is forced to live with her grandfather at Egdon Heath. She does not like the change but is forced to adapt to it. Her imagination overtakes her reality as one sees less of human life in the heath. She believes that love is the only cure to her loneliness. She longs more for passionate love than for any particular lover. She is highly critical of 'Destiny'. She believes that only 'Destiny' controls her finding love and that the same would also cause her love to sink. She desires passionate love to keep herself occupied. In the novel, Eustacia's idea of love is described in the following manner:

Fidelity in love for fidelity's sake had less attraction for her than for most women: fidelity because of love's grip had much. A blaze of love, and extinction, was better than a lantern glimmer of the same which should last long years. On this head she knew by prevision what most women learn only by experience: she had mentally walked round in love, told the towers thereof, considered its palaces; and concluded that love was but a doleful joy. Yet she desired it, as one in a desert would be thankful for brackish water. (79-80)

Hence, she finds Wildeve, an eligible man to help her with the cause. When she learns from her grandfather that Wildeve has not married Thomasin yet, she lights a fire as a signal for him to meet her and persuades him to not marry Thomasin. Diggory Venn, the reddleman who is also in love with Thomasin is a witness to this conversation and warns Mrs. Yeobright about the affair. Wildeve is determined to marry Thomasin. This having been made clear, Eustacia shifts her focus to Clym Yeobright. Clym, is Thomasin's cousin who has returned home after a long time. Hardy describes Clym as one with a singular personalities: "Had Heaven preserved Yeobright from a wearing habit of meditation, people would have said, 'A handsome man.' Had his brain unfolded under sharper contours they would have said, 'A thoughtful man.' But an inner strenuousness was preying upon an outer symmetry and they rated his look as singular" (161-162).

Eustacia desires an opportunity to meet Clym but fails, though she waits for him continually. She resolves to look for him no more but the opposite happens and Hardy blames Providence for it. "But Providence is nothing if not coquettish; and no sooner had Eustacia formed this resolve than the opportunity came which, while sought, had been entirely withholden" (140).

Clym and Eustacia meet and eventually marry, much against the wishes of Mrs. Yeobright who is aware of the affair between Wildeve and Eustacia. Reality dawns on the characters when mundane life begins. Clym discovers he is losing his sight, gives up his dream to educate those in the heath and takes up furze-cutting. Eustacia is unhappy. Wildeve and Thomasin do not find their happiness in one another. The lovers, Wildeve and Eustacia, seek each other but Venn, makes sure that their plans become futile. Mrs. Yeobright wants to make peace with her son and goes to the newlyweds' home but is not welcomed by Eustacia. While Clym is asleep, Wildeve goes to meet Eustacia and in the meanwhile, Mrs. Yeobright also goes to the house. Eustacia does not open the door for her. Mrs. Yeobright, returns heart-broken, to be killed by the bite of an adder. Clym is driven mad by the sense of guilt and then by hatred towards Eustacia. Wildeve and Eustacia plan to leave the heath but die by falling into a flooding river. Venn marries Thomasin after Wildeve's death and Clym becomes a preacher.

Eustacia Vye lives by the principle of *carpe diem*, to live for the day and enjoy it. Hardy gives a detailed description of Eustacia's beauty. He compares her to the Sphinx, Artemis, Athena and Hera. Hardy goes further on to explain that her eyes are Pagan and that she could have been able to sleep with her eyes open. The description of Eustacia is beautiful: "Her presence brought memories of such things as Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical midnights; her moods recalled lotus-eaters and the march in 'Athaliae'; her motions, the ebb and flow of the sea; her voice, the viola" (76).

Eustacia absorbs all that was dark from Egdon Heath. Though she is well learned, she is rebellious. She cannot not see the beauty of the heath; nor can she live in harmony with nature. She causes pain not

only to herself but also to others through her actions. Even after knowing that her choices may cause permanent damage to people and relationships, she still chooses them. Wildevve, on the other hand, wants more than one woman to please him emotionally, physically and materialistically. The cousins, Clym and Thomasin become victims. They choose poorly and suffer from their choices. These characters undergo both deserved and underserved suffering. Thomasin is to blame for choosing Wildevve instead of Venn because he seems to be more prospective.

Clym, marries Eustacia, against the wishes and warnings of his mother and consequently loses his mother and his wife. His wife, in spite of the marriage vow, to be with him in sickness or health and in his richness or poverty, finds fault with him when he loses his sight. The reddleman, Diggory Venn, is the most patient character in the novel, who waits patiently for love and remains loyal and steadfast even when he has been pushed aside as a second choice because of his trade.

C.S. Lewis says that pain, like pleasure, can also be received. Everything given to a creature by free will must be two-edged, not by the nature of the giver but by the nature of the recipient (97, *The Problem of Pain*). One cannot say that the individual who suffers long, suffers more than the other. The intensity of pain caused and its effect on the character may vary depending on the circumstance and the cause.

Clym seems to suffer more than the other characters in the novel. The guilt he carries after his mother's death makes him mentally upset and hysterical. In the book, *Thomas Hardy's Realism and Pessimism*, it is said that "Hardy seems to be at one with the German philosophers that all individuals do not feel pain with the same intensity." and that "Hardy's position on this point may be put in Julian's words: 'It is not the thing, but the sensitiveness to the thing, which is the true measure of pain'" (141).

In *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy*, Hardy believes that pain has been constant. "Pain, has been, and pain is: no new sort of morals in Nature can remove pain from the past and make it pleasure for those who its infallible estimators, the bearers thereof" (97). Hardy questions this pain and suffering which is prevalent in every man's life: sickness, loss of a loved one, suffering both emotionally and mentally, unrequited love and the list will fill umpteen number of pages as there is no end to pain and suffering here on this earth. Every man becomes a victim in this vicious circle of life and there is no escape. In Hardy's novel, Eustacia represents the modern world that is hasty in its decisions and loves fun and frolic. Eustacia takes everything in her life for granted even with the knowledge of the repercussions she will have to face. Life does not always offer a second chance. Eustacia dreams of living a free life in Paris, this dream being the main reason for her to marry Clym. Freedom is not always as open as it seems, it cripples one based on the decisions one makes. It is like a test given to man to determine whether he will trample on and take advantage of the freedom given or will he use the gift of freedom wisely. Hardy's view on freedom is seen in his biography, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy*: "We call our age an age of Freedom. Yet Freedom, under her incubus of armaments, territorial ambitions smugly disguised as patriotism, superstitions, conventions of every sort, is of such stunted proportions in this her so-called time, that the human race is likely to be extinct before Freedom arrives at maturity" (139).

Hardy also projects the necessity to live by the morals of the rural life. Values and beliefs are given priority and though they may not bring wealth and fame, they do bring a fulfillment that money cannot buy. In the essay, *Hardy's Major Fiction*, John Hollaway says, "The novel resolves in an assertion of the old order, its regenerative austerity, its rewarding unrewardingness" (269). Hardy's emphasis on rural life and the ideas of freedom, pain and suffering are interconnected. One cannot understand the need for Hardy to address these issues of pain and suffering without understanding the rural scenario in Victorian England.

The question of undeserved pain and suffering are age old questions of theodicy that man has never failed to ask. Many writers question, why God, if there is a God never put an end to undeserved suffering? C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Problem of Pain*, says:

It is so arranged that all forms of it can live only by preying upon another. In the lower forms this process entails only death, but in the higher there appears a new quality called

consciousness which enables it to be attended with pain. The creatures cause pain by being born, and live by inflicting pain, and in pain they mostly die. In the most complex of all the creatures, Man, yet another quality appears, which we call reason, whereby he is enabled to foresee his own pain which henceforth is preceded with acute mental suffering, and to foresee his own death while keenly desiring permanence. It also enables men by a hundred ingenious contrivances to inflict a great deal more pain than they otherwise could have done on one another and on the irrational creatures. (1)

Reason and consciousness are the main causes of man's pain. When one considers the animal world, one can only imagine an abstract pain but with man, pain is real and it makes an individual bend and break in its power. The German philosopher, Schopenhauer believes that life is sunk in suffering (141, *Thomas Hardy's Realism and Pessimism*). Suffering is inevitable and is caused by one's own actions, another's actions and sometimes by nature. Pain in the novel, is suffered by every character, the cause being Eustacia and decisions made by other characters based on her. Love, induces and elevates the pain in the characters. So, if pain has to be removed then love too, has to be removed from human kind. As discussed earlier, pain is caused by the sensitiveness to the thing or to someone. To eradicate pain is to eradicate compassion, mercy and selflessness.

Mankind in its imperfect state, chooses to love and hurt, love being the fundamental to its being. Hardy and many other Victorian writers fail to see this truth and remain strong that the God above is the cause for all pain. It is believed that God has granted to man, free-will and free-will, has its drawbacks as well when one chooses poorly. Free-will causes the divide, men stand on both sides of the battle field and fight for what they believe is true and noble, they fight for that which they love. In *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy*, Hardy speaks of this but does not come to the realization of it: "The intelligence of this collective personality Humanity is pervasive, ubiquitous, like that of God. Hence, e.g. on the one hand we could hear the roar of the cannon, discern the rush of the battalions, on the other hear the voice of a man protesting, etc." (226).

As the saying goes, to love is to be vulnerable, to love is to put someone else above one's self even if that causes pain and suffering. Writers like Hardy feared that life without communion with nature will make men mere machinery. If the world does not primarily function by love, then, the world would be a very large industry producing incredible output but the essence of everyday living will be gone. Sadly, the world is heading towards this end. Pain, is a part of human nature and exhibits its nature to love. In today's world, Hardy would probably choose pain rather than a humanity that is self-driven and not compassionate. Hence, pain is essential for human kind as it is the evidence that love exists in this world. Humanity, no matter how modernized it has become, needs compassion and love to function.

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