



“Failure, Frustration and futility’ as an inescapable condition of life in Jude the obscure’

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Thomas Hardy’s novel, “Jude the Obscure,” is poignant exploration of the relentless presence of failure, frustration, and futility in the lives of its characters. This research paper delves into the novel’s thematic depth, examining how these elements permeate the narrative, shaping the destinies of the characters, and reflecting the societal norms and values of the Victorian era. Through a close analysis of key characters and events, this paper explores how Jude Fawley’s relentless pursuit of knowledge, love, and self-fulfillment becomes a tragic manifestation of the inescapable forces of failure, frustration, and futility in a rigidly stratified society.

Thomas Hardy stands at the threshold of modernity as he, in “Jude the obscure’ turns away from agricultural setting and pastoral myth to a restless world of cities and psychological insecurities; with this novel we enter the more austere, aesthetic world of the modernism. Hardy repeatedly declared that his novels “contain impressions of the moment rather, than any systematised or well concerned view of life. Rutland (critic) comments in this context:“..... He was a thinker in the sense all great artists are thinkers.”

Like any other great artist, Hardy also pondered over such questions: What is life? What is the meaning of evil? Against what does a man struggle all his life? Is man helpless? What is man’s position in the universe? And above all: Why should man suffer at all? Under the influence of scientists like Darwin, Hardy came to realise the world was no picnic spot and undeserved pain and suffering came from unexpected quarters. He also came to realise that suffering came



because of man's ability or refusal to make adjustments. It also came because man's tried to impose his own meaning or a pattern of desire on whatever is happening around him rather than to accept things as they are. Even a cursory perusal of Hardy's literary work gives the impression that "happiness was but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain." But it is to be kept in mind that Hardy is primarily an artist and as an artist he depicts the tragic side of life. In the tragedies of Shakespeare "character is destiny", but in Hardy's tragedies. "Destiny seems to be the character." In this way he seems to be akin to the Greek tragedians. Here things seem to be pre-ordained and man seems to be struggling for happiness and glory in vain.

Like Browning, Hardy does not envisage any other-worldly compensation for his suffering protagonists; for them "the broken arcs" will not reunite in the heaven's perfect round. These characters in Hardy struggle in vain against an indecipherable destiny. They seek its help, in all ignorance, sometimes. But then the result is always the same. They are always crushed in unequal fights. Hardy describes the whole tragedy of human life to same "unsympathetic first cause" According to him "Providence is nothing if not coquettish, which brings rain when it is not needed and never a drop of water when it is highly urgent". Hardy quotes Shakespeare with advantage: "As flies to wanton boys, so are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport". In "Mayor of Casterbridge", Henchard can not understand the cause of his ruination.

Fate manifests itself through various agencies:-

- Chance and coincidence,
- Blind impulses like sexual urges, love, jealousy, pride and ambition.



These manifestations are future supported by society, religion, industrial and scientific progress.

In the case of Jude, his weakness for female flesh along with his ambition plays an important role in his complete destruction. Jude and Sue also suffer because the society and religion in the shape of various institutions like marriage and ethics come in direct conflict with them. Arabella's chance meetings with Jude are the cause of much anguish and suffering for the two protagonists.

Tragic in Conception and gloomy in the frustrating incidents narrated there-in, 'Jude the obscure' triggers in the reader a universal sense of tragedy. In the preface of the first edition of the novel Hardy suggests that the novel is "addressed by a man to men and women of full age" and that it deals with "fret and fever, derision and disaster" Which emanate because of "a deadly war between flesh and spirit." He also informs the reader that this was "points to the tragedy of unfulfilled aims." It is obvious that the novelist intended to produce a novel of epic stature dealing with the dark and gloomy side of human life. In this novel human ambitions are shattered by the characters' own inherent weaknesses and also due to extraneous causes such as fate, coincidence, poverty, society and religion.

'Jude' indeed is a tragedy pointing to unfulfilled aims. But what are the aims that remain unfulfilled. For Jude the aims are: "to enjoy" life and achieve "happiness." This he wants to achieve by going to christminster "the new Jerusalem", the "city of light" where "the trees of knowledge grows." He wants to go christminster to pursue higher studies so that he can be a 'Doctor of Divinity, even a bishop, with a little fate, he may even become an arch-deacon. Thus he wants to emerge out of the social and economical obscurity to achieve some recognition. Jude's another aim is "love." He experiments with love two times. In Arabella, he gets nothing



but lust. In sue he faces conflicts, ambivalence and ultimate tragedy. For sue, another character, life is too dark a tunnel where dimeigut flickers just once or twice. A victim of her own “obscurity,” she weaves her life, and others, with the darkest possible yarn. Her yearning for happiness also gets scotched as the novel inches towards its end.

Phillotsan also aspired for higher education and social status besides some money. He moves from Marygreen to christminstes with the hope of achieving something in life. But years later, when Jude meets him, he still is the same school master; His experiments with marriage from which he wanted some “ little happiness” and “a little love from a woman much too his junior in age also end in a nightmare.” He too does not get love, nor happiness. Even Arabella, who traps Jude into a love less marriage does not get what she wants from life. At the end of the novel we find her turned into a nurse who serves the invalid Jude free of cost.

But let us concentrate only on Jude, Sue and Arabella to comprehend how this tragedy takes place. As pointed out at the beginning Hardy himself points the needle of suspicion towards “ the strongest passion known to humanity. Unlike Shelle who believed that to the lover, the loved is a person of divine radiance and hardly a thing of flesh. Hardy allows the lovers the need for an emotional commitment and therefore the significance a provision of earthly aspects of love such as physical contact. Because of this reason Hardy has characters devoted purely to sensuality, characters struggling with sensuality and higher aims and characters roaring higher and higher in a realm where practically all flavour of the flesh has been washed out, like Sue.

Arabella and Sue in a way stand as the symbols of two dynamic forces. Jude’s sexuality has been externalized in Arabella and his finer, intellectual ambition in Sue. These two women compete in order to gain mastery over Jude. His marriage with Arabella had disturbed all his plans to go to



christminister. Then her desertion propels him into a new plan to surge ahead. This time he finds him self trapped in the charms of (the La Belle dame sinsmerci) his sweet faced cousin.

Arabella has been called “a complete and substantial female animal” and thus represents effectively the concept of flesh in the novel. Her shameless vulgar manner hypnotises Jude with her voluptuous body. In Sue there are manifest of the rarest qualities of intellect. “Sue also exhibits the fact that, She is devoid of animal passion. Sue marries phillotson on the assumption that there would be no sexual contact. But dissatisfied Sue moves towards Jude to gratify her intellectual and romantic needs. Here too she intends to restrict the relation to a non-sexual level. Now Sue loves Jude but for Jude mere “love is not sufficients. He feels the great pull of sexual urges simmering in his body. The ambivalence on the part of sue forces Jude to call her “You spirit, you disembodied creatures, you dear tantalising phantom hardly flesh at all.” The naked struggle goes on and in the process Jude’s ambitions to be a bishop are destroyed.

He then lowers his aim and deceives to be a licentiate. But he has to choose between his love, Sue or the service of the church. He prefers the former and burus all the books. The scence is powerfully symbolic in the sense that Jude sacrifices one aim on the altar of the other. But does he succeed? No, he loses the battle again with the ghastly hanging of the children by “octogenarian” Father Time. Consequently, Sue also deserts him. This way whatever Jude aspired for is all lost. The ending of all novel is tragic where Jude curses the day he was born. “Let the day perish where in I was born, and the night in which it was said, “ There is a man child conceived “and “why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?



References:-

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