ABSTRACT

Agnosticism emerged as an important Weltanschauung in the middle of the nineteenth century in England. It influenced some of the major writers of the day. Since the Biblical myth lost much of its authenticity, the ethos became problematic. The writers found it difficult to examine the situation in the context of any acceptable worldview. The novel of doubt expressing agnosticism became an important medium of cultural communication. Writers like George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Samuel Butler came under the impact of agnosticism and refused to accept the Christian verities. Their tragic vision is an expression of the spiritual anguish of their time. It lent profundity and richness to their writings and also set the modern writers on a quest for identity which continues till this day. Hence, an attempt in this thesis to discuss these three writers and the influence they handed down to the new generation. The purport of the present study is to critical examine the selected writings of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Samuel Butler to show how an agnostic finds it difficult to arrive at any kind of moral or spiritual certainty. Each of them works out their own system whereby to examine the human character. Moreover, their attempt to discover their own system of values, leads to the era of subjectivity. Man is to discover values in his own interiority and thus the tradition continues till this day.