

Chapter six

MALE DOMINANCE AND RUTHLESS OPPRESSION

MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE AND PRAVACHAKANTE VAZHI

COERCION OF THE FEMALE SELF

Centuries of Patriarchal culture and Male dominance have implanted in the female, an inescapable sense of its own dependence on and submission to the Male. All the female characters in Mayor of Casterbridge and Pravachakante Vazhi delineate their stereotyped subservience to the abiding power of the male characters. It is curious to observe that Elizabeth Jane always devoutly followed the Patriarchal order personified by her father.

After the revelation made by the furrity woman, as has been pointed out by Dale Crammer, Hardy seems to have forgotten to write the scene of Elizabeth Jane confronting Henchard. Marjorie Gason explores further the intricacies of the same problem:

' Apparently the knowledge that Henchard had lied to her in asserting that he and Susan 'thought each other dead -and-Newson became her husband' ¹ and that he had sold her mother and she believes, her own infant self spurs Elizabeth- Jane not to confront Henchard, not to question her own paternity, not to mourn the stain which this publicity might cast upon her own reputation but instead to urge the Father's claim to Lucetta!' ²

The sense of fear and dependence induced by the Male Ego may help to explain Elizabeth-Jane's unflinching faith and adherence to Henchard though it is her mother who bore untold miseries on her behalf. The woman's position in society is

legitimised by her father's name, where the mother hardly matters. Elizabeth-Jane even alludes to the episode of her mother's separation from her father having cast shadows upon her life. Henchard's Male Ego cleverly plays on Elizabeth-Jane's anxiety for social respectability, a concept devised and maintained by the Patriarchal culture.

Newson is yet another shallow version of the same Patriarchal Culture, who must surface at the moment least warranted to stake his claim over the daughter whom he had earlier forsaken for dubious reasons, only to disappear once again to revive nostalgic memories of the sea he left behind. The repressed self of the female must always seek her identity through the dominant Patriarchy. Marjorie Garson observes:

'Moreover, she had grown up under Newson's paternal care; and even had Henchard been her father in nature, this father in early domiciliation might almost have carried the point against him, when the incidents of her parting with Henchard had a little worn off.'³

Pravachakante Vazhi traces a similar strain of the Male Ego's relentless exploitation of the female and inducement of the sense of fear and insecurity in them. Here the fear has its roots in centuries- old tales of violence against women:

'...Our great grand mothers were raped by barbarians of opulent beauty and power, who crossed the mountains through the caverns. Thus our generations of golden coloured women, Rema, myself were born. We strive to flee this humiliation and orgy. It could be the first sin of woman. She may be Sougandhika, irresistible temptation, pursuing her aroma, armies cross the fields and mountain passes, everywhere, anytime. Roman soldiers raped the entire tribe of Sobein tribe...'⁴

'Agnisakshi', a Malayalam novel by Lalithambika Antharjanam highlights this theme of the Male domination in the Patriarchal Culture of Kerala in the first half of the twentieth century. Unni Namboodiri, the Male protagonist says to his wife who has been denied all the love and warmth of marital life, " Marriage is not for indulgence but for sacrifice. Life is a sacred ritual, the Fire sacrifice" ⁵

P.K.Rajasekharan makes the following observation:

" This type of conditioning, which requires of the woman to suppress her passions, is the creation of Patriarchal culture. It stultifies her soul and body, and puts it under the control of man." ⁶

THE MALE EGO BOASTS OF ITS MISOGYNISM

In both the novels, there are instances of the Male Ego condemning the female for his own inability to rise in the world and prides in his being a misogynist. Henchard ascribes the entire blame on his young wife for having failed to make material success in the world. He is extremely contemptuous of Susan's ignorance and naiveté. Victorian ideals of Patriarchy demand the subjugation of competing passions for financial and material success. Henchard nurtures the arrogant and insistent faith that a life, free of his wife and female child, may retrieve the energy and zest to his life:

'The conversation took a high turn, as it often does on such occasions. The ruin of good men by bad wives, and more particularly the frustration of many promising youth's high aims and hopes, and the extinction of his energies, by an early imprudent marriage, was the theme.'

"I did for myself that way thoroughly", said the trusser, with a contemplative bitterness that was well nigh resentful. " I married at eighteen, like the fool that I was; and this is the

consequence o't." He pointed at himself and family with a wave of hand intended to bring out the penuriousness of the exhibition.' ⁷

Henchard's financial success and prosperity in Casterbridge are ascribed to the alienation from women and sexual sublimation. He boasts to Farfrae:

' "Well- no wife could I hear of all that time; and being by nature something of a woman-hater I have found it no hardship to keep mostly at a distance from the sex. No wife could I hear of, I say, till this very day..." ⁸

In Pravachakante Vazhi, women are more forgetful and forgiving. They may blissfully ignore their male counterpart's earlier reckless life and offer them solace, as they approach the dilapidation and disintegration towards the end of their existence. Sujan Singh's quest for prosperity and success bears comparable analogy with that of Henchard in that he is equally guilty of disregarding the existence of the female. Here too the woman is forgiving and compassionate to the crimes and follies of the Male Ego:

'Satwant grew compassionate. She said," What answer would you like to have, I will give it"
 ...Satwant saw only this, the might and vigour of Singh that will conquer her for another night, tonight and all nights, her paramour grows lusty, he begins to disrobe her as during the conjugal night. As the reward Satwant kept her body's lasciviousness for him.' ⁹

PATRIARCHAL MAIN CULTURE AND MATRIARCHAL SUB-CULTURE

Patriarchy assumes for itself all the vestiges of being the centre of a culture and civilisation. It is always unwilling to grant a meaningful role and a sense of participation for the female. In the inevitable situation that ensues, a woman develops her own subculture, which could exist only in subservience to the Patriarchal main culture. Susan epitomises the miserable plight of the womankind, when she is being sold as a commodity and when she journeys back in search of Henchard. She is haunted by fears of the fate of the female child who may not survive without Patriarchal signature.

There is no hint in the novel to suggest that there existed any shadow of real love between Henchard and Susan. The female's long and tedious journey in search of the man, who has wronged her, may be seen as the pathetic quest of the female subculture to survive in a world where the Patriarchal main culture has asserted its hegemony. Even when admitted back into the household of Henchard, Susan and Elizabeth-Jane remain inconspicuous figures. Hardy observes:

"The house was large, the room lofty, and the landings wide;
and the two unassuming women scarcely made a perceptible
addition to its contents" ¹⁰

Henchard's whole commitment is to the male community. He strives to define human relationships by the male codes of money, paternity, honour and legal contract. Paternity is one of the cardinal themes of the book. Dale Krammer points out the significance of the wife sale:

'By his act Henchard sells out or divorces his own 'feminine' self,
his own need for passion, tenderness, and loyalty. The return of
Susan and Elizabeth-Jane which precipitates the main phase of
the novel is indeed a return of the repressed, which forces

Henchard gradually to confront the tragic inadequacy of his codes, the arid limits of patriarchal power.' ¹¹

The Patriarchal culture has imposed on the feminine psyche, the feeling that they exist to cater to the male whim. The moment they cease to be of interest to man, they fade out of meaningful existence. When a male character like Henchard can survive and prosper away from women, the women are made to look forward to the male to validate their societal existence. Lucetta's cry of despair towards the end of her life is characteristic of the female's paranoiac dependence on her husband's regard: "he will never love me any more- and O, it will kill me- kill me!" ¹²

Vijayan explores a similar note thorough the agony of Rema and the apathy of the male members towards her desolation and suffering:

'Narayanan again conversed with Rema-

Narayanan noted down the question in mind, 'Then?'

'Then, Narayanan, I gave the indulgent man an elixir only a woman is capable of giving, nuptial bed, my breast milk that is not yet yielded. Will you return to my city?'

From the subtle plain, the footnote of Rema, 'I realise the totality of woman, Narayanan. While I was anointing the wounds of the lascivious man, through the slit of the eye, he smiled at me. At my back I could feel two little hands trying to push me towards the man, a lispng again calling me mother, Oh mother,

'So you got married?'

'Yes, today I am a wife.'

'Also a stranger, isn't it Rema?' ¹³

None of the female characters in Pravachakante Vazhi has an existence or individuality of her own. The Patriarchal culture always assumes the self-imposed task of defining the female according to its perceptions. Sevanthi, the prostitute talks to Narayanan in a dream like monologue:

"Once we also had desires, we hail from an aristocratic lineage. Word is incarnate.'

Narayanan felt revulsion. He retorted, ' How can you be aristocrats?'

Again the same laughter.

' We don't know,' words said, ' we are born in the sacrificial fire of racial slaughter. Look here, she is truth, she is equality, the third one is freedom.' ¹⁴

Towards the end of the novel, Rema vocalises the fear imposed on the collective unconscious of the female by centuries of domination by the patriarchal culture:

'Narayanan bolted door of the coupe and held Rema in a deep embrace. Her own memories frightened her,'

Narayanan, please, don't, don't!'

'What, Rema?'

'My history's pangs should not come back to me. I need only Atharva Veda, which advocated worship of Mother Nature. Let me seek solace in the hounded Sikh and selfless agony of Shikhanti.' ¹⁵

In 'Indulekha', considered as the first characteristic novel in Malayalam, by Chandu Menon, the heroine rightly points out the cause of female subjugation:

"I feel that women are mostly brought up like animals and that becomes the prime cause of prostitution." ¹⁶

Prof Joseph Mundassery observed:

" In literature women are always condemned by a seat of Justice which is highly prejudiced against them from the beginning."¹⁷

WOMEN ARE MORE VULNERABLE TO THE MACHINATIONS OF SOCIETY

The Male dominated society is always seeking opportunities to wreck havoc on the female who deviates from its tenuous ethical code. Even if the male is party to the act of misadventure, he is rendered impregnable in the end. Hardy intensifies this irony in the depiction of tragic aftermath of the skimmington-ride. Lucetta's wrecked honour and miscarriage kills her. Henchard manages to come out of the situation unscathed.

Vijayan's juxtaposition of ancient and contemporary history brings forth a situation of high contrast with Hardy's depiction of female vulnerability. The conversation between Narayanan the journalist and Sujan Singh, an ex-soldier during the Second World War, illustrates the tragic plight of women before the male oppressors:

Sujan Singh's mind began to calculate, he said, " firing, death, encroachment"

" One, two, three, let us go to four, a city surrenders. All the men of the city are waging a battle far away. Only women are left behind. What the army can do?"

Sujan Singh did not reply. Narayanan continued, you are forced to search out the men who may be hiding. You have to harass the women. You must find out whether she is hiding some weapon in the body for guerrilla warfare. Remember she is young and beautiful. Then what you will do naturally?' ¹⁸

THE MALE EGO SEEKING TO HIDE ITS SENSE OF SIN

While the male characters betray their intolerance even at the slightest hint of unfaithfulness on the part of the female, they conveniently forsake their own past of tinged deeds and sin. Henchard with his professed aversion to the female can still engage himself in an affair with the woman from Jersey, a relationship whose exact nature is mysteriously left unexplained in the novel. It is curious to note that the reader is made conscious of this affair only through the male's description of it to another male (Farfrae) who understandably is indifferent to it:

" In the nature of things, Farfrae, it is almost impossible that a man of my sort should have good fortune to tide through twenty years o'life without making more blunders than one.

...Though Farfrae, between you and me, as man and man, I solemnly declare that philandering with womankind has neither my vice nor my virtue."¹⁹

Though clearly devoid of any ardent passion, Henchard insists on pursuing the path of threatens and blackmail to harass a woman much against her pleadings.

When the nemesis strikes back, Sujan Singh must recollect the enormity of the crime he perpetrated against the unsophisticated girl of the primeval jungles of Burma:

'...From the smooth bed of bloodthirsty leeches, Chinthei carries him to the hut of the forest goddess. Oh God, thought Sujan Singh, I did not even ask her name, did not conquer her heathen paramour, didn't wait to see the birth of the elder brother of Simran.' Sujan Singh raised his eyes to the skies. Memories of love and familiarities vanished. Instead vultures alone loomed like black spots in the whirls above.'²⁰

Henchard and Sujan Singh meet in their unrelenting acts of sin against the hapless, unsuspecting female, and later ascribe the whole blame to the flippancy and temptations of youthfulness.

SUBMISSION AS A FEMALE ATTRIBUTE

Both Hardy and Vijayan attribute the tendency to be submissive as predominantly a female attribute. When the male characters resort to extreme violence and ruthlessness to meet their ends, the female characters are passive and resigned to their lot, imposed on them by the Male dominated society.

In the much-discussed wrestling match between Henchard and Farfrae, considered as the central male contest in the novel, Henchard has Farfrae at his mercy. After Farfrae goes, Henchard was so thoroughly subdued,

'that he remained on the sacks in a crouching attitude, unusual for a man, and for such a man. Its womanliness sat tragically on the figure so stern a piece of virility.'²¹

Here Hardy presents submission and meekness as an attribute of woman. The obvious reason is that centuries of repression has relegated a woman to a position, where she meekly accepted every treatment meted out to her. Long ago women has lost the ability to resist and defend themselves against the male oppressor. In the scene where Lucetta meets Henchard, deliberately putting on a pathetic appearance, she is again bringing to the fore this attitude of submissiveness.

Henchard's understanding of women is constituted by a kind of Patriarchal dominance, which demands total submission on the part of the female:

'Her figure in the midst of the huge enclosure, the unusual plainness of her dress, her attitude of hope and appeal, so

strongly revived in his soul the memory of another ill-used woman who had stood there and thus in bygone days, had now passed away into her rest, that he was unmanned, and his breast smote him for having attempted on one of a sex so weak.²²

Joseph reveals yet another aspect of this submissiveness to Narayanan in

Pravachakante Vazhi:

"Narayanan, I am writing a book-'Indian History Through Various Facets of Wine Brewing Cultures'. One chapter deals with tribal people in forests, making liquor from the flowers of Mahua tree. In Kalahandi forest I have seen women dancing inebriated drinking this liquor. Timber dealers are now axing down those Mahua trees and prostituting the women-Narayanan I hope that the circle will be complete here.'²³

Incidentally here too, there is no mention of the tribal men folk directly assailed by the timber merchants, as they don't reveal the tendency to be submissive as in the case of women.

ARROGANCE AS A MALE ATTRIBUTE

The total effect of the Henchard's Male Ego poised against the female characters in the novel is that, he towers above them all with his aggressiveness. Henchard's physical solidity and energy diminish the stature of female characters like Susan whose total lack of vitality and 'ghostliness' establish her less as a human being. Henchard suspects that, "somebody has been roasting an waxen image of me", and that "some power is working against him", when rain causes him financial ruin.

Through these images, Hardy is giving the traditional portrait of the primitive aggressive male ego, with traditional fears and imaginings.

The arrogant Male Ego develops or destroys human relationships and bonds according to considerations of self-esteem. He is reluctant to welcome Susan back into his home as a "relief from domestic loneliness". Instead he indulges in a kind of self-pity these acts of redemption bring with them. The most conspicuous of them is the lowering of his dignity in public opinion by "marrying so comparatively a humble woman"

Vijayan's male characters also reveal a high degree of Male arrogance and consider the woman as an inconsequential creature who can be used to further his interests in a world where only the most aggressive individual stands a chance to triumph over. Sevanthi becomes the representative of the victims of this Male aggression. For her, all the male characters from the mythical Lord Krishna to Sunder and Politician are visible images of the Male aggression and dominance. She narrates the pathetic quest of the woman to escape from the arrogant male:

"He taught me to play on the flute, classical music, devotional songs," Sevanthi's voice grew sad and strange. She sobbed, "Tell your Sunder, that jealousy is evil."

Sevanthi goes onto narrate archetypal and contemporary images of Male aggression and female deprivation:

"...Behind wars, popular uprisings and industrial might, there stands hidden a prostitute...I have only sheer derision for the feminists and women liberators. The men who never understand the stripped women of the nights of sin, bespectacled intellectuals." ²⁴

In the Malayalam, novels of Valsala, like Nellu, Chaver, Koomankolli and Palayam, we have the powerful portrayal of the desperate plight of women against their male oppressors.

THE MALE EGO'S ALIENATION FROM THE WORLD

In its eagerness to assert its exclusive rights to dominate the female and the entire space, the Male Ego finds increasingly alienated and distraught with the rest of the humanity. The male ego weaves a circle around his being, from which he is unable to extricate himself. But such moments seldom lead to introspection and revelation to him. In the last desperate and frantic bid, he cajoles himself either to total domination or destruction.

This seems to be increasingly true with the male protagonist of the novel, Michael Henchard. He tends to affect the lives of other characters in such way that, he systematically destroys the possibility for them to lead lives of their own. Through the pattern of the plot, he brings about their eventual destruction. All the female characters suffer through the machinations of his Ego and ultimately cow down or bow out of the scene.

After creating havoc in the society and family that engulfs his person, the Male Ego emphatically refuses to assume any responsibility, and attributes the entire blame on agencies outside and beyond him:

"the loneliness of my domestic life when the world seems to have the blackness of hell and, like Job, I could curse the day that gave me birth" ²⁵

The Male Ego's note of self-assertion and later abnegation, find resonance in a strikingly similar way in Pravachakante Vazhi. The archetypal images of the Male Ego, after its dominance, seeks to blame some other agencies for the disasters it brought on the community of women and the society in general:

'To escape from the amok of the antique sword, from the condemnations of the forefathers and their bewailing, the leader fled through loneliness. The profound spectacle of that fleeing drove the unlettered masses to ecstasy. They cried in unison, 'the invincible sacrificial horse of India'. Through the parched throat there came out the words of the leader," I am nothing. Only the King of the Penurious. The man who idiosyncratically claimed to have discovered India. I could find in the waters of Ganga my own ageing face. Oh Ganga, daughter, mother, and beloved, why don't you conceal the wrinkles on my face?'²⁶

DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE MALE EGO

In Mayor of Casterbridge , it is not only in the figure of the protagonist, Michael Henchard that we find the emphatic assertion of the Male Ego but in all male characters, from Farfrae to nondescript Newson. While distancing himself from his former employer and his creed, Farfrae creates and asserts his own version of the Male Ego. There is not the slightest hint in the novel to suggest that, Farfrae's feelings towards members of the opposite sex are genuine and sincere.

Beneath the façade of gentility and humaness, Farfrae betrays the deeply impregnated Male Ego that surfaces at unguarded moments. From his opposition to Henchard in the Whittle episode to his refusal to seek out Henchard towards the end of the novel, Farfrae revels in the sophisticated version of the Male Ego. Farfrae's

relationships with Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane smirks of sheer opportunism and hypocrisy. No genuine excuses are ever offered for his affected love for Elizabeth-Jane and later for forsaking her for the sake of the more pompous lady.

His fascination for and later marriage with Lucetta survives on principles of dubious co-habitation. His Male Ego skilfully engages itself in a kind of role-play or 'acting-in'. It never penetrates to the deeper core of his being. This dubious aspect of Farfrae's Male Ego is emphasised at the beginning of his life in Casterbridge when he could sing nostalgically about an Ireland to where he does have no professed desire to return.

If the Male Ego of Farfrae has any explicit ideology, it is one of survival at the expense of others, especially of the weaker sex. He registers blatant disregard for the feelings of Elizabeth-Jane when he switches over to Lucetta. His gesture of hiring the young man, so that he may not get separated from his beloved lacks any genuine feeling or comprehension of the situation, but could be deemed as a tokenism or ploy of the Male Ego, to impress itself on the female psyche as her protector and patron saint.

Farfrae's Male Ego discards the veil with his unabashed statement at the death of Lucetta: 'it was hard to believe that life with her would have been productive of further happiness' which brings to the fore the crude insensitivity and shallowness of the Male Ego.

In the character of Newson may be discerned even a shallower state of conscience. If Henchard considers the woman as a commodity to be bartered in the thoroughfare, Newson is equally guilty of offering five guineas to that commodity. The acts of Henchard and Newson amount to betraying the trust bestowed on them by the weaker sex.

Like Farfrae's own Male Ego, singularised for its hypocrisy and fraudulence, Newson's warmth of feeling for either Susan or Elizabeth-Jane is highly questionable. On the impulse of a certain moment dictated by his Ego, he strays into Casterbridge to reclaim his daughter, only to disappear with the conjectured nostalgia of a sea he is incapable of obliterating.

In Pravachakante Vazhi, none of the male characters ever retrace their steps from perpetrating violence and exploitation against women. It ranges from the elite journalist Narayanan to Sujjan Singh, the soldier turned taxi-driver. Sevanthi presents a scapegoat image of the Indian victimised woman:

' Seated between three amorous men, she ate the victuals...'

'Yes, Sevanthi is the slave girl of god. She is also the pious Sati. Every night a new widowhood'

'Every night a new marriage; with profound respect she welcomed old and handicapped to her bed. Switching off the barbaric music of stereo, she sang the paeans of Lord Pasupathinatha. Like the eternally snow covered peaks of Pasupathinatha stood exposed before these husbands. Nights of endless nightmares. To protect themselves from the harrowing sense of sin, these men put on various guises. One pretended to be an infant sucking her nipples. Another imposed on himself the illusion of being the conqueror in racial war. As their physic became dilapidated and souls died, Sevanthi sat beside their dead bodies mourning. As the primal rays of sun penetrated the red district, Sati in Sevanthi immolated herself in that fire.' ²⁷

THE MALE EGO'S RESORT TO MURDER AND SUICIDE

The male protagonists in Hardy and Vijayan take recourse to attempted murder, as their attempts at aggressive domination leads to disruptions within the social and family environments. These attempts at murder and suicide by the Male Ego is an overt attempt to evade the responsibility of the crime and oppression they committed, especially against the female members of the society.

In a recent study Howe makes the observation:

"The intimate connection between self-destruction and aggression emerged clearly from the many incidents in which the offender's intentions wavered uncertainly between murder and suicide".²⁸

His attempted murder of Farfrae and contemplating suicide at Ten Hatches, point out this disarrayed state of conscience, which still wants to assert its dominance over the whole society. Rosemary Summer makes the following observation:

" It has been suggested that individuals unable to come to terms with their aggressive drives may either repress them and turn them inward against the self, or disown them and attribute them to other, or express them in explosive or childish forms. Henchard does all the three. The selling of Susan, the "roaring" at Whittle, the dismissal of Farfrae, to shouting in council so that "his voice might be hard as far as the town pump", and many other episodes all have an explosive, childish quality."²⁹

In Pravachakante Vazhi, Narayanan, the male protagonist recreates this murderous instinct of the Male Ego through the juxtaposition of a mythical and realistic sequence:

" Let us rewrite the epics, Narayanan. To Dridharashtra who asked Sanjaya, as to what his sons and Pandavas are doing in Kurukshetra, let us say, 'Oh Great Father, your and Pandu's sons lie dead in the slime and blood, not in Kurukshetra, but in tomorrow's Indraprastha, where man murders man and man copulates women at the point of sword.'" ³⁰

WOMAN AS A COMMODITY

Both the novels present women as a dispensable commodity. In the Male dominated society, a woman is never accorded a chance to come into her own. In the intensely dramatic scene of auction, Henchard does not consider his wife much different from the ageing dilapidated animals auctioned off outside the tent. The wife and the female child are for him an encumbrance, which prevents him making headway in life.

Ian Gregor notes:

"Susan is sold at a strange dream-like auction in which there are no bidders, but the price goes up and up. I think it is possible to make too much of the particulars of this vivid and bizarre scene, so that the whole emphasis falls on the act of selling itself, the reduction of a person to a commodity." ³¹

Going back to the pages of history, it could be seen that in Victorian society, though wife-sale was extra ordinary, it was not uncommon. Factual accounts for the source of this bizarre episode could be traced in the Dorset County Chronicle and the Brighton Gazette. In the character of Henchard could be discerned the total

picture of the Male Ego in the Victorian Society, his rebellion, jealousy, paranoia and uncontrollable unconscious.

Vijayan's novel presents an analogous picture of the woman. Baba the mad mystic, relates the pathetic saga of the Indian women in a pithy aphorism:

"You are on the search out for your woman, isn't it?"

"Yes Baba"

"Have you seen the animals driven to the slaughter house?"

"Seen"

"Same is the fate of your cow. Don't you call her the tricky cow that strayed in across the boundary?"

'Narayanan did not answer. Sitting beside Sevanthi, he bowed to the Baba'

"In this city there emerge huge crowds of widows and orphans.

Within days they will disappear into brothels of different lands.

The investors in riots should get back their capital along with interest." ³²

THE MALE EGO AND ALCOHOLISM

After perpetrating heinous acts of sin and crime on women, the Male Ego tries to evade the responsibility and ascribes the blame on the momentary effect of the alcohol. The novels under study elicit more than one instance, where the male players, stirred by the will to dominate, drag womanhood to total annihilation. The Male Ego seeks solace in the stupor of alcohol to escape the overwhelming and harrowing sense of wrongdoing.

For all the major aberrations of Henchard, the blame is put on the alcoholic daze, like the wife selling, interrupting the Royal visitor and later the

attempted murder of Farfrae. At all the crucial moments in life, the Male Ego's conscience betrays the inadequacy to control the impulses, and so the excuse of alcoholic stupor.

There is a striking parallel between Henchard and Paul Morel in D.H.Lawrence's 'Sons and Lovers'. Both depend on alcoholic stupor to evade the responsibility of the acts they commit against female counterparts. Paul Morel and Henchard depend heavily on the arrogant dominance of the Male Ego but are unwilling to assume the responsibility it carries. So alcohol turns out to be the exit for the Male Ego from the Labyrinth of its own making.

Sujan Singh of Pravachakante Vazhi may offer study in the co-habitation of Male Ego and alcohol. Satvanth Singh, a soldier in his former days is an explicit case of the chicanery of the Male Ego. The ex-soldier who drew his wife to the brink of penury in her years of growing old, and who has a hoary saga of female deception and exploitation must seek the alcoholic vapours as the cause of the present hopelessness. Here too Satvanth, the female has been reduced to the role of a passive witness, having been denied the right to interfere in the drama of life scripted and directed by the Male Ego.

During the moments that Sujan Singh recalls the past and the irretrievable, he differs from Michael Henchard only in the time-space co-ordinates:

'In these exchanges in the night, Satvanth felt Sujan Singh growing helpless like a child, the child who sought solace in the space between her breasts. If she began saying, " Whenever I talk about this house-" preventing her Sujan Singh would say," I have offended, Sonia. I could not become a pilot. But I should not have turned a wretched

drunkard. If it had been otherwise I could have implanted you in Defence Colony or Housekhas." ³³

THE MALE EGO CHALLENGING THE DIVINE

We can trace instances in Hardy and Vijayan, when the Male Ego reaches out to the point of even challenging, distorting and anagrammatising divine agency and Will. This could be seen as an attempt of the Male Ego to destabilise and dethrone the ethical systems and assert its dominance and supremacy over the members of the weaker sex.

Henchard's attempt to reassert himself and prevent the disintegration of his authority very often border on violence, profanity and sacrilege. His worst instance for the misuse of the sacred text occurs at *Three Mariners*. He debases himself into an act of violence forcing the choir to sing the 109th Psalm just because he happens to see Lucetta and Farfrae passing through.

An incident of intense similarity occurs in *Pravachakante Vazhi*, as Darveez the butcher-turned-mystic unfolds his derision towards the orthodox concept of God and divinity:

"...I never kneel down before god. But I prostrate before the failed god who withdraw hearing the horrified cries of slaughtered cows. Sometimes I do it on his right, sometimes on the left, sometimes inside." ³⁴

The Male Ego of Darveez strikes the deepest chord of the sacrilegious in the passage that follows:

'I forget my many names,' Ansari said, 'Will tell the name that surfaces in the mind-Dharmavyadhan, don't you remember Vyadhan, the butcher in Mahabharatha?'

Darveez laughed an uproarious laughter, 'Vyadhan! That guy is just a retailer! Isn't Krishna the greatest butcher in Mahabharatha? As he said Nainam chindanti sasthanam-'³⁵

THE MALE EGO AND THE IRRATIONAL

As the strategies to dominate over the world and specifically the female, bring in chaos that confound the Male Ego, he relies heavily on the extra sensory. Henchard, Narayanan and a host of male characters are unable to avoid the road to the irrational.

Henchard's macabre experience at the Ten Hatches, his visit to the weather prophet, his serious doubt as to someone must be burning a wax image of his, Narayanan seeking the aid of the mystic, Joseph's conversion to Samnyas, are all instances of the Male Ego's attempts at evading responsibility and to seek asylum in the ethereal reality.

A man willing to assume the responsibility of his deeds scarcely need the assistance of an agency above and beyond him. If he strikes that path, it will amount to his disclaiming his heroic stature. Here the Male Ego seeks to retain its exclusive identity and domineering inclination, even as the process of disintegration sets in.

Rosemary Sumner emphasises:

' Individuals unable to come to terms with their aggressive drives may either repress them and turn them inward against the self, or disown them in explosive childish forms.'³⁶

MALE EGO- LOVE, SEX AND VOID

The complex and intricate relationship between love and sex, and the inherent void these associations carry may throw much light on the working of the Male Ego in Hardy and Vijayan. In aggressive personalities like that of Henchard and Sujan Singh, sexual needs are subservient to emotive or choleric love. Though Henchard claims to Farfrae, "being by nature something of woman-hater, I have found no hardship to keep mostly at a distance from the sex", his deeds studied at a deeper level reveal the contrary.

In both the novels the repressed or denied sex at times causes violent eruptions. In love and sex, the Male Ego of Henchard goes to violent extremes. His insistence on Elizabeth- Jane to accept his surname, his coercion of Lucetta to marry him against her will, all betray the violence of the repressed sex lurking in the Male Ego. Henchard's Ego desperately needs superiority and dominance. So love, irrespective of its nature and kind, becomes a dire necessity for him.

The observation made by Storr helps to analyse the complex nature of the Male Ego and its irrepressible desire to dominate:

"One characteristic of the adult schizoid is a strong desire for power and superiority, combined with an inner feeling of vulnerability and weakness".³⁷

After contemplating exposing Elizabeth-Jane's illegitimacy to Farfrae he soon repents the harshness of it:

"Why should I be subject to these visitors of the devil when I fight so hard to keep them away?"³⁸

It could be seen as a subconscious attempt of the Male Ego to evade the responsibility of his thoughts by ascribing them to the devil.

It is obvious that Henchard seeks love and filial affection from Farfrae, Elizabeth-Jane and Lucetta not because of any genuine feeling but to fill the emotional void within his own person. The Male Ego should seek sustenance and support from those willing to offer love, as its morale touches the nadir. Storr's thesis helps to explore further dimensions of the Male Ego:

'...failure in a love-relationship is felt as an attack upon the self. The extreme hatred which is mobilised by rejection is actually self-preservative; an attempt by the rejected person himself in spite of the injury to his pride. The more dependent the person is on the love of another, the more he will feel threatened and therefore hostile if this love is withdrawn.'³⁹

MALE DOMINANCE AND NULLIFICATION OF THE FEMALE

The Mayor of Casterbridge has as its kaleidoscope the Victorian England while Vijayan greatly confines himself to the India of the 1970's, though the novel is replete with the history of the human civilisation, spanning over a period of time from

Mesopotamia. Thus it happens that the period and the people introduced in the two novels differ considerably in the socio-political and ethnic contexts.

But these apparent differences do not stand in the way in reaching the inference that the human character, in spite of the differences in the ethnicity and space-time continuums does not vary considerably. The Male Ego is one of the basic traits of humanity that has its origin possibly in pre-historic times. It continues to remain alive and prominent in various forms and aspects even in this advanced state of civilisation.

Michael Henchard imbibes all the heterogeneous aspects of the typical Victorian Male chivalry and chauvinism. He is induced by the characteristic urge of the Victorian Male to dominate and exert his will over the female members of the society. His relentless struggle to identify himself with the Victorian norms of masculinity and success compels him to override sentiments of all sorts, especially of women.

The characters of Pravachakante Vazhi inhabit a world of similar strife, competition and uncertainty, though the geographical and time-space equations are vastly different. It is a world entirely dictated by the survival mores of the Male protagonists. Narayanan, Sujan Singh and Joseph must systematically silence and dominate over the repressed psyche of the female.

Both the novels betray an overzealous attempt on the part of the male protagonists to sideline and nullify the relevance of the female. They are in connivance with medieval and contemporary theories and hypothesis, to assert their unquestionable authority over woman.

Prof Joseph Mundassery, one of the prominent critics of Malayalam literature, makes the following observation:

"In all the literatures ninety percentage of the women depicted are subjected to the malicious effects of the male domination...women are presented in such a way that their tragic suffering ennoble them. Women are sacrificed at the seat of justice, which ironically is prejudiced against them, and the novel reading public feels elated at the tragic dignity accorded to these woman characters."⁴⁰

In one of the Interviews with the students from a college, Vijayan makes his view clear about the issue of women being sidelined in his novels:

Interviewer: " Why the prominent issues of Kerala never find their way into literature? For instance the issues relates to women..."

Vijayan: "It should come from women writers. I must say in my novels women's view point seldom appear." ⁴¹

Here the novelist's own attitude seems to favour a Male-hegemonic society where the woman's role is always subservient to that of man.

Nearly a century back, Hardy the Victorian novelist's attitude towards this question of the Male-dominated society does not seem to be much different. The novelist seems to give silent assent to the Patriarchal culture with the sensational opening scene of the wife-sale. According to Howe, with this scene Hardy is playing on

the suppressed longings of its male audience, evoking sympathy for Henchard because of his crime, and not in spite of it.

Dale Kramer agrees to this theory:

"For Henchard to sell his son would be so drastic a violation of Patriarchal culture that it would wrench the entire novel out of shape; but the sale of a daughter-in this case only a 'tiny girl'-seems almost natural. There may even be a suggestion that this too is an act insidiously attractive to male fantasy, the rejection of the wife who has only borne female offspring." ⁴²

So ultimately it turns out that despite the space of nearly hundred years spanning these two novels, the prominent issue explored here, viz, the Dominance of the Male Ego as manifested through the character study of the Male protagonists is a reality. Male hegemony and the oppression of the female are acts, which the Patriarchal societies of both the novels carry out with ritual purity and religious sanctity.

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