Marriage should be a combining of two whole independent existences, not a retreat, an annexation, a flight, a remedy. — Simone De Beauvoir

Traditionally a woman is integrated with the community only through a marriage. Different theories have been propounded from ages to make marriage, therefore, obligatory for women. Accordingly an unmarried woman is usually defined negatively. Even modern marriage is nothing but a perpetuation of the traditional one. Of course, for both male and female the reality of marriage is at the same time a burden and a benefit. However, the reality of marriage has been different for man and woman. Since man is the economic head of the family, it is through marriage woman gets a share of his world. She joins his class, religion and almost becomes a vassal to him. She is confined to the reproductive role; and the ideology of fidelity is enforced upon her. Inspite of the increase of her productive work outside marriage, she is not completely free from her socalled reproductive role. Moreover this role — model is forced more tyrannically upon woman than man. Inspite of this hard fact of marriage as an institution, its ideological pressure is so deep rooted in women's consciousness that most women accept it as unavoidable,
as inevitable. Again in most countries, the divorce laws for women still function as tools in favour of marriage. The socio-economic pressures on the divorced woman work in such a way that divorce seems to her a redefinition of marriage and not its end. From this perspective I have tried to analyse the character of Jili in Paraja and Sue Bridehead in Jude the Obscure. I have tried to show the manner in which both of them are made to surrender to the laws of marriage, and their traumatic experiences resulting from it.

SUE BRIDEHEAD

One of the central subjects of Jude the Obscure is the limitation of marriage. Hardy was critical of the 1857 Divorce Act. This act favoured the rich and the male and virtually did not help the women and the oppressed in getting a divorce. Hardy's objection is set against the formal relationship of the institution of marriage which permanently binds two separate individuals in an unhappy situation. Hardy questions the so-called everlasting bond of union. He describes the marriage ceremony of Jude and Arabella:

The two swore that at every other time of their lives till death took them, they would assume believe, feel and desire precisely as they had believed, felt and desired during the few preceding weeks. What was remarkable as the undertaking itself was the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore. (65)
We find the ironic consequence of the above undertaking when Jude realizes:

Their lives were ruined, he thought, ruined by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union: that of having based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a lifelong comradeship tolerable. (80)

Instead of integrating personal sentiments, the institution of marriage imposes a false logic of conjugal love and thereby suppresses individuality. In fact the principles of marriage and love have nothing in common. Love is related to emotional spontaneity whereas marriage is a decision. 'The fundamental error' of such matrimonial union is perhaps to mix love and duty in a traditional sense.

In one instance Sue says to Jude, "Now if I had done such a thing, it would have been different, and not remarkable, for I at least don't regard it as a Sacrament". (199) For her the institutionalised form of marriage is a constraint upon the individual human freedom. Just before her marriage to Phillotson Sue wrote a letter to Jude:

Jude, will you give me away? ... I have been looking at the marriage service in the prayer book and it seems to me very humiliating that a given away should be required at all. According to the ceremony as there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure, but I don't choose him. Somebody gives me to him, like a she ass, a she-goat.
or any other domestic animal. Bless your exalted views of woman, O Churchman! (204)

(author's emphasis)

She condemns this ceremony, its ritual, marriage scriptures and its makers. She bitterly criticizes the system where a woman's choice, will and pleasure do not matter at all. A woman does not marry, she is married to someone. A man takes a wife - a possession that enlarges his social identity. Moreover, a woman is given away by somebody. She goes to some one. "She takes his name, she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle, she joins his family, she becomes his half".²

Sue's reaction against the rigid conventional marriage manual is known when she cannot tolerate even the presence of her sexually repulsive husband Phillotson, becomes tired of her mental anguish, and wants a pleading with these words:

"Domestic laws should be made according to temperaments which should be classified. Will you let me?"

['But we are married'-]

"What is the use of thinking of laws and ordinances, if they make you miserable when you know you are committing no sin? (268)

Here Sue faces a difficult situation. To get a divorce from Phillotson she
is supposed to provide, as per the law, factual datum or proofs of her husband's 'incestuous Adultery, or of Bigamy with Adultery or of Rape, or of Sodomy or Bestiality.' According to the 1878 amendment, she is supposed to prove 'aggravated' assault. Neither compatibility nor mental cruelty was admissible ground at the time. Sue, then, has no grounds for divorce in the novel. But the double standard implication of the marriage law becomes obvious when Phillotson divorces Sue on the basis of her refusal to continue to cohabit with him compounded with an accusation of adultery. Sue leaves Phillotson and comes to stay with Jude. Sue's challenge to the institution of marriage is a challenge to the social structure itself. As Gillingham says: "If people did as you want to do, there'd be a domestic disintegration. The family would no longer be the social unit". (282) In a conventional society marriage is associated with production of children. In a patriarchal society, the state authorities man an access to woman's body. This power is exercised through marriage. Family as a patriarchal institution makes the children's needs supersede the mother's need for self expression.

By entering into sexual relationship outside the institution of marriage Sue hopes to make a private ideology of her own and thereby to conquer the social conventions. Her ideology faces an external opposition (the bourgeois ideology about the sexuality of women, family etc). Her
private ideology of comradeship does not fit into the public realm of production and power. Sue becomes a victim of patriarchal family system and suffers. After the death of all the children she goes back to Phillotson again. Towards the end of the novel Sue's dumb silence is even more painful than Jude's death. Like the physical death of Jude, it is her spiritual death. After that she has no voice, she does not utter anything and her existence becomes bereft of meaning.

Sue breaks the tradition. But she despises herself later for breaking it. She refers to her dead children as sinbegotten. It is the same person who once hated the conventional marriage manual. She now thinks that the reason behind her tragedy is the insult which she inflicted upon the solemnity of her first marriage. Sue accepts the old logic which haunts her in the form of a guilt created by the so-called inexorable social laws. When Sue decides to return to Phillotson Jude asks:

What I can't understand in you is your extraordinary blindness now to your old logic. Is it peculiar to you, or is it common to women? Is a woman a thinking unit at all, or a fraction always wanting its integer? (392)

The answer to Sue's 'extraordinary blindness' can be explained in the context of her indoctrination of self hatred. As the novel
shows, Sue is taught by her father, right from her infancy to develop a sense of hatred for her departed mother. By doing so she learnt to hate the woman in her which is resulted in a sort of self distrust. She is never confident of any decision she makes on her own. However, after her decision to stay with her university scholar friend, Mr. Bridehead, her father cuts off relation with his daughter and thereafter he is seen no more in the novel. The shadow of an absent father figure affects her mind and that is why perhaps she develops a tendency towards an approval seeking (a kind of infantile dependency) nature. She clings to Phillotson as a substitute father figure, seeks her identity in wifedom and submits painfully, "I cannot believe you forgive your wife!" (139) Even from Jude she seeks protection, "And I for you. Because you are single hearted, and forgiving to your faulty and tiresome little Sue!" (184) Sue submits to Phillotson more out of duty than of anything else. She is very much conscious of this fact as she explains to Jude that most of the women give themselves to men from consideration rather than real love: "Fewer women like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to confer, and the social advantages it gains them sometimes - a dignity and an advantage that I am willing to do without". (312)

However, her childlike submission to Jude is an emotional
dependence. She plays an appealing little girl's role particularly in those moments she feels threatened by his withdrawal of affection. "He is the one male she respects, admires, and with whom she identifies. By the same token, he is the one male from whom she seeks respect, admiration, identification. But whether he likes it or not, he is, by virtue of his maleness alone, in authority over her".4

Sue violates the conventional orthodoxy in all respect. Like marriage, religion, morality, love, friendship etc. have a different connotations for her. Sue speaks about her undergraduate university scholar friend: "He was the most irreligious man I ever knew, and the most moral". (180) Traditionally religion and morality are interrelated. Sue's religiousity is not that of the Church-kind. For her, religion or morality does not mean a kind of simple sincerity of following some rituals or going through a prayer book. She speaks of her radical view as follows:

And intellect at Christminster is new wine in old bottles. The mediaevalism of Christminster must go, be sloughed off, or Christminster itself will have to go ... but when I was in my saddest, rightest mind I always felt, O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted Gods! (180)

Traditionally it is expected that whatever she does and with whoever she talks, she should have a feeling of her feminine gender. But she speaks
to Jude, "I have no fear of men as such, nor their books, I have mixed with one or two of them particularly almost as one of their own sex. I mean I have not felt about them as most women are taught to feel". (177) Likewise Sue reacts to human sexual relationship in unconventional and complex way. She has learnt from her experience with Phillotson that sexual relationship within the context of marriage is nothing more than a mechanical performance where the personal choice or will of a woman is not taken into consideration. As Sue cries bitterly, "what tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes". (221) In such a situation Sue constitutes a part of Phillotson's household furnitures who absorbs himself in 'balancing the school registers' and then muttering on about school committees and daughty ventilators, [he] can ascend to nuptial chamber, (264) as if sexual intercourse with his wife becomes an extension (of one more duty) of his day – to – day routine. He assumes that Sue's sexual submission to him is a moral obligation. And for Sue it is like involving oneself in a daily continuous tragedy. Such reaction to sexual relation and her indecisiveness are interpreted by critics as Sue's sexual frigidity and neurosis. Havelock Ellis, however, defends Sue and says that to describe Sue as a neurotic is to reveal an attitude which considers human sexual relationship to be as simple as those of the farmyard.5
But, in spite of her logical understanding of the patriarchal world, Sue surrenders to it painfully and destroys herself. Her individual self is buried under the ideological burden of an androcentric world. The forces working behind her submission are personified both in Phillotson and Jude. Jude, however mild, patient and loving also exercises authority over Sue unconsciously and like Phillotson he also denies her an individual existence. As Rosemarie Morgan says: "In Sue's world, as elsewhere in Hardy's microcosmic world, the repercussions of this denial are far-reaching and tragic". 

JIJI

In order to understand Jili's position within the institution of marriage we may begin at that point in the novel, Paraja when she is rejected by her lover Bagla in preference of Kajodi, a friend of hers. Bagla could not pay the bride-price, as per the tribal customs to Jili's father. This socio-economic disjunction in the relationship of Bagla and Jili cannot be overemphasized. We may note here also that Jili leaves the tribal community when her brothers and father become bonded labourers of the moneylender Ramachandra Sahukar. Jili goes out to work in a construction site as a daily wage earner. We might say that Jili cuts her roots off from the tribal community only when her prospective marriage with Bagla does not materialise. That is the beginning of Jili's isolation from the community and this isolation is largely
caused by socio-economic factors. After this event in her life she does not have any meaningful love relationship with any one in the novel. In fact her moral degradation and disintegration begins at this point.

Jili operates against a patriarchal background where marriage is defined as the last aim of a woman's life without which a vast void awaits her:

[But a time comes when even the little sparrow is eager to build a nest; collects twigs from here and there. The irresponsible, open playful life of the butterfly does not attract any more. Shoulders seek the yoke naturally, otherwise life becomes bland ... The little babies play and shout. The hens and the pigs come and soon crowd the place. All of them need care and personal attention ... She needs the presence of even a drunkard husband, though he scolds, as it is part of some sorrows, some happiness of a household. And all these constant responsibilities she needs badly.]

We find here that the natural image of bird-nesting is equated with the social image of home-making. The bird must make a nest to live in. It is a natural process. But home-making or marriage involves a deliberate action. As the author describes, the delicate butterfly (i.e. the unmarried girl) voluntarily invites constant responsibility
and a sort of bonded life. Further, the sentence "the shoulder needs a yoke" brings the image of a yoked animal. In the context, it is really a fearful image not only because it suggests that a woman is a wild animal to be tamed, but it also indicates that the animal needs or wants to be tamed. Thus to put the yoke becomes for the tamer a necessary, moral and elevating experience. Hence a woman must be controlled by a man. She must be whipped by the responsibilities of married life. She must be yoked to the male authority. The image of flying butterfly suggests a brittle and free life. It is natural, as it is said here, for a woman to reject this free life and to desire for a life under a yoke. The author perceives that marriage for the woman even if it involves the scoldings of a drunkard husband, taking care of babies, household work etc. is essential and natural.

In another paragraph it is even suggested that the married life is more moral, more necessary, and probably inevitable.

(92) [It seems she is left neglected. The rest seem so happy. The glittering red vermillion marks in their foreheads, the keys, the nose buds and rings and moreover children in their arms. All those seem to tease her. She cries within herself. She dreams of a]
tired husband returning from his daily labour, she thinks of a child to nurture. It seems to be the basic requirements in a woman's life, a cheap ticket to have a secured place in a solid society.

The images like vermillion marks and keys are symbolical expressions of a definite, settled and conventionally satisfied life. The first few lines show the pleasure of a married woman and her so called marital bliss in being settled and able to 'control' the household. Again this idea that a married woman can undervalue an unmarried life shows the extent of conditioning by a patriarchal value system. An unmarried life of a woman seems to the author as a land of emptiness. It is not my point to make any preferential value judgement on those two modes of living. But the way these two kinds of life for a woman is described suggests that a woman is bound to prefer a married life. However, the last sentence is a sort of dismantling of the whole mystery of married life of a woman. The image of a "cheap" ticket refers to the so-called manly protection given to a woman. Marriage, for woman means a ticket for securing this protection. It is necessary to get a place under the sun. It is this social stamp that determines a woman's identity and existence.

Maternity must follow matrimony in a traditional society. Jill's consciousness is manipulated through such beliefs and assumptions:
She felt like picking up the child, with a running nose, when she saw him on the road... She felt comforted when she consoled the crying child on her bosom. She felt a stream of joy running through her when she caressed the child... If she found no one looking at her she would play with the children. She would smile and whisper into their ears, "call me 'mother', 'mother'..."

These lines show in an exaggerated manner Jili's desire for experiencing maternity. The argument is very vapid. It also shows that to be a mother is more a biological need than anything else. The above lines, it may be noted, are situated in the context of Jili's desire for sexual union: "Jili lies like a dead snake in the evening hour — she cannot sleep." (280) [Jili lies like a dead snake in the evening hour — she cannot sleep.]

The snake image is obviously sexual in connotation. The dead snake image indicates her suppressed sexuality. The thought of becoming a mother comes at that stage and worries her, according to the author. It seems to me that the worries or the sleeplessness is not just a straightforward desire for a baby. Even after she lives with Ramachandra Sahukar we do not find her consciously thinking for achieving motherhood. Her physical needs seem to have been described in cultural terms like marriage and motherhood. The reason for this is that the attainment of sexual freedom by unmarried women is made difficult by social
customs. In a tribal culture like that of the Paraja's, where freedom of passion is believed to be celebrated, Jili as a woman is compelled to live with her suppressed sexuality. It is interesting to note here that Gopinath, a champion of tribal vivacity and freedom depends on middle class cultural terms of matrimony and maternity in order to express the sexuality of a tribal woman here. Gopinath as a writer would not free himself completely from middleclass moral ethos, especially with regard to women's sexuality even when he celebrates the zest for living of the tribal. That is why Jili is for all her sense of freedom, indirectly expresses a fear of sexual interaction and this fear sometimes returns upon her.

At this point we may examine the author's attitude to a single woman's loneliness:

A woman's heart is never empty. Any one with flesh and blood who searches for a void in her, is disillusioned. The springs of life have always gushed forth. Even a saintly woman's sainthood is a cover. Within her is the intense desire to enjoy and experience. There is no pretension at heart's centre.

Here, woman's loneliness is defined only in sexual term. Neither Jili nor Kajodi can experience in the novel a metaphysical loneliness.
By saying that woman is not hypocritical in the subconscious level, the author refers to her hypocrisy in the conscious level on sexual matters. Again the supposed lively experience is not described elaborately. Perhaps it refers to secret sexual enjoyment. This experience is described in terms of a simile like "jewel" and there by a higher value is given to it. It shows that the author glorifies this experience. But by juxtaposing it with woman's hypocrisy, the nature of the experience is made confused and mystified. It is as if anything which is not straight, not true or not brave is attributed to women.

Again we find: " свой дорога шведа швед, в гид роспись хвост гладко, свой бедра..." (89) [Again the body becomes languorous, needs someone to lean upon, it seems like a dream ...]. Words like 'languorous', 'leaning' suggest the idea of a sexual intention. "Someone to lean upon" brings the image of a masculine body, and Jill's need to lean against it. Thus her loneliness is restricted to a physical level. Of course, it is a truth that we cannot understand the spiritual and abstract matters unless we also realize physical facts of life. Moreover, the whole paragraph unconsciously reveals the deep male fear of the power or myth of female sexuality. And woman, therefore, inversely described as a hypocrite. She is a kind of illusion, and anyone who tries to see reality in her will be certainly disillusioned and harassed.
As we find in the novel, all the hopes and aspirations of Jili are limited within the dream of becoming a housewife. So she thinks: "(320) [She will make her own way. All her sorrows will come to an end, if she becomes the wife of Sahukar. She cares for none. It is totally a new life. And the raining dark night brings its signals.] Here, the image of a dark night in the rainy season is sexual in its connotation, because it is only in the night she goes to Ramachandra Sahukar for sex. The word 'gharani' (housewife) is a social image. By becoming the housewife or 'gharani' of Ramachandra Sahukar she will get social recognition. Her secret sexual life with him will have a social stamp. Only in this sense it is a new life. Again the narrative shows that her desire to be a housewife is related with a desire to rise above her own social level: "(323) [Her marriage will be over as soon as he gives the "jhola-tanka". Friends and relatives need a feast only. Then they will see that she is socially higher than a Paraja woman. Let them see her and her position. She encourages...]."
herself like a child. She needs encouragement every moment.

In the Paraja society, “jhola-tanka” or bride-price means the amount of money which the father receives from the bridegroom in exchange of his daughter in marriage. In the strict sense, it is a sort of selling of a woman. Jili could not marry Bagla only for this practice, and this point cannot be ignored. But now it is not a problem for Jili. She will be the wife of a Sahukar - an owner of huge property. This will place her in a higher social and financial position than her own people. Ironically her desire for this social honour seems to be a reaction against her social environment. She thinks like this: “...মাঝটা যদি সে কেন্দ্র, আম তখনা জীব ৫০০ ঱্যাত ছাড় দাঁড়িয়ে রাখো। আম ২৫ বছর যাগুকি অনুমান দিয়ে, আম তখনা, আম কিটি কিতা রুহী, আম এ তার টাকা, তাতে টাকা, তুলেদের রুপ টাকা, আম একটু ভাল করি দিয়ে।” (322) [She feels like laughing without any reason and then immediately her mind becomes hard. It seems she is taking revenge against others. She is not so invalid, she thinks. Like others she has also got some engagements, a life with a game of hide and seek.] Jili feels that she is right in taking revenge. But all her rightness and strength are limited within a sexual role. The ‘hide and seek play’ refers to her secret sexual enjoyment. All her engagement in life is defined in terms of sex. As if she goes to Ramachandra Sahukar only to prove that she is not sexually invalid or insipid. On the one hand it shows the violent reaction of a woman against the
social and sexual restrictions in which she is made to live. On the other hand it shows the limitation of her reaction and identity. The sense of power she enjoys against Ramachandra Sahukar through her sexuality is to be noted here. Given the circumstances she has no other avenues open to her. This is a sort of mutilation of Jili’s identity. As in the novel, the protest of Sukru Jani and his sons against their exploitation is simply romanticized and forgotten, Jili’s power of woman’s body disturbing the power structure and value system is not presented with due awareness. Rather she is presented in a defeated and purposeless existence.

Very often Gopinath tries to show the reality of the institution of marriage in the novel. But ironically and unfortunately it is shown, within the context, as an inevitability for women. That is why it is difficult to get a clear picture of this annihilating (desire to marry) experience which almost mutilates a warm and dynamic woman like Jili and dooms her to a meaningless existence. For example, marriage is described as a burden and at the same time a benefit for women: "...婆媳 住址 婆媳 住址 住址 婆媳 婆媳住址, 婆媳 婆媳 婆媳, 婆媳. 婆媳住址....婆媳 住址 婆媳 婆媳. 住址 住址 住址, 婆媳, 住址 住址 住址 婆媳. 住址 婆媳, 婆媳 住址 住址 婆媳, 婆媳 住址 婆媳 住址. (178 - 79) [There are so many things that get entangled in her mind
like shadows and darkness. Is it real? Again the thought passes away...

... The mind learns to be in new chains, in new ties. It may be some ornaments, marriage, yet it has its weight and value. It looks nice, though sometimes it hurts.] The lines show that a woman is always eager to be possessed through marriage. It may be a shackle, yet she wants to wear it. She is eager to shoulder that burden even if it is painful. It becomes indispensable for her.

In another place we find how the social restriction on sexual satisfaction as well as the difficult situation for marriage of a woman drag her to a more distressful condition, when Jili surrenders herself to Sahukar, the exploiter of her own people:

Now Jili does not feel ashamed, rather a sort of strange languor has enveloped her. She accepts this old man like a solid pillar of support in her life. She leans against him. Now she does not feel embarrassed. When the whole village falls asleep, she comes out of her father's home. As if she is going to look after a new household of her own. Sometimes she feels uneasy, but she becomes used to it.

The 'veil of shame' refers to the notion of guilt in her sexual surrender to Sahukar. Gradually this feeling is eliminated. Here, the word 'languor' indicates a sort of casualness which is caused due to her sexual
familiarity with Sahukar. It is as if, in this context, her physical passion lacks a human dignity. Sahukar is described as a solid pillar. It brings in the idea of his strong financial and social position – as a male and as a money lender. Jili as an insecure woman – a weak entity (due to her class position and gender) needs a pillar to lean against. Jili is forced to accept Sahukar as her pillar of support in condition of utter distress and misery. But at the end of the novel we see all her dreams and aspiration of a happy household end in empty passivity and meaninglessness. In the broader context of the novel, it is the non-tribal materialist civilization engulfing the elemental jest for living in a tribal world. Likewise, the patriarchal value system within that tribal culture has destroyed Jili’s strength and power as a woman. Her surrender to Sahukar shows the capricious male imperialism through the institution of marriage.

We find that surrender to the institution of marriage is the central issue both in the life of Jili and of Sue Bridehead. Social advantage and economic necessity are fairly evident in Jili’s surrender to Sahukar. Sue’s individualism collapses due to the overwhelming effects of the beliefs and values of the dominant patriarchal culture. Both surrender to the
system knowingly. Jili is only conscious of her precarious socio-economic condition whereas Sue is more conscious of her radicalism and at the same time of her helplessness before the inexorable social laws. However, both of them give themselves to men from a fear of a sense of insecurity as women.

Notes


