Conclusions

The feministic writers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Simon de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and Elaine Showalter stressed the need of equality of man and woman. They justified their views by showing certain good characteristics of women and tried to emancipate women from the chains of conventions like male chauvinism. Only biological differences cannot discriminate the man and woman at different level they suggested. Women may lack the physical strength but they possess some extra powers too, they say. Theirs is the most valuable contribution to the society and they play vital role for framing the structure of successful family and progressive society.

The social and political ethos in the Victorian period makes it clear that the lives of women were insecure unlike men. Their role was always considered to be subsidiary and they were more often than not oppressed and denied their fundamental rights. Though it was an age of progress, women were omitted from these progressive stages. It is because in their domestic life the Victorians upheld the authority of parents over children. Women
were expected to be the machines of producing children and rearing them up and look after the home and the hearth. They were even kept away from the educational development.

In the period when all the doors were closed on the woman by the conventions, it was quite difficult for a writer like Thomas Hardy to swim against the current to glorify the women in his novels. But having deep sympathy about women in his mind Hardy portrayed his women with great skill showing them bold, courageous, loving, socially and psychologically conscious. In all his novels he discussed the contemporary problems in the midnineteenth century England like marriage and divorce. He showed that the institution of marriage is not only a contract or a ceremony of dignity but it is also a union of two minds. He tried to expose the chauvinistic and barbarous system of wife sale. He discussed the potentials of Bathsheba along with the power of discharging responsibility of Tess for the sake of her family. He highlighted the independent views of Eustacia and Sue who is frail, delicately balanced. Sue is radical, sceptic and she ponders and questions the arrangements and tyrannies of society.
Despite being a Victorian writer Thomas Hardy portrays his women characters who posses the qualities that are more than not sufficient to call the woman 'a perfect human being'. It is true that Thomas Hardy cannot be called a complete feministic writer. Though his women do try their level best to be "feminist women" but they are constrained to surrender before the society, and its conventions. The age in which Hardy was living did not allow him to present his heroines completely successful in attaining their goals against the patriarchal society. He could not bypass the conventions completely due to his Victorian moral contemporary moral and social upbringing though he tried to put forth it with ample courage. Eustacia Vye in 'The Return of the Native' is confined to the somber and gloomy place. She is shown to be full of Promethean rebelliousness against circumstances and fate but all her efforts, all her contrivances and all her rebellion proves to be of no avail and in the end she fulfills her own prophecy regarding her doom in relation to the heath- "Tis my cross, my shame, and will be my death", she says. (The Ret. of the Nat.p.82)

"According to Hardy society and conventions are enemies of human beings and when they combine with fate and a man's
inherent weaknesses of character they can easily crush him - social conventions are proved to be against nature. They are traps ultimately kill human beings. Hardy's attack is mainly directed against the conventions of marriage. To Sue in 'Jude the Obscure' living a married life is a no better than having a limb amputated. According to her a genuine wedlock means absence of love and prevalence of bitterness and hatred. Sue does not have the courage to marry Jude because she fears their love would vanish as it has vanished from the lives of many married couples. She believes that marriage is a tragedy in the lives of most people. She says about her views of marriage that 'I dare say it happens to lots of women, only they submit and I kick' (J.O. Part IV, p.213) Hardy showed that even though his characters have the courage to kick, the iron-handles of conventions can crush them in to submission. Sue’s return to conventionality symbolizes man’s defeat by this enemy which is too great for him.” (Prasad, p.124-125)

Tess with all her courage tries to live in the society by resisting all the adverse conditions but by the end of the novel the man like Alec does not allow her to live her life happily and she has to stab Alec. Bathsheba though quite independent in her
views, showing all her prudence, skill and efficiency has to succumb before the patriarchal society only because of the conventional institutions like marriage. But this shows Hardy's sympathy for his women.

To sum up it is not Hardy who treats his women cruelly but it is the life - life as Hardy saw it. What Hardy could do for his women he did- he made them full of beauty, interest, fascinating and lovable qualities of all kinds. He gave them great parts to play and let them play those parts well. As H.C.Duffin writes, Hardy's estimate of women is high, but tempered and conditioned by keen observation of realities around him. He has the necessary ideas of her as a creature nobly planned and bright with angelic radiance, but he knows also that it is only in rare cases that she is sound free, undimmed, and ideal. In short Hardy is no misogynist but true lover in very deed. (Duffin .p.238)

So we can see that though constrained by the tyrannical conventions and the social norms of the Victorian and the social norms of the Victorian Age in which Hardy grew and wrote his novels, he was not without compassion for the women and treated them almost equal to the men in qualities as well as well as in their
actions. But we cannot call him a complete feministic writer in the sense the term is used in the present day literary cannon, we can certainly say that, though his women do adhere to the Victorian norms and conventions in practice, in spirit each one of them, possesses a flash of the modern "feministic" new woman that the Feminist writers like Showalter and Beauvoir would like a woman to be and thus we can say that Hardy's women are more liberalized and modern in their actions than most of the other woman characters portrayed by his other contemporaries.
References


