

Chapter V

THE THEME OF KARUNA RASA (TRAGIC) IN HARDY'S NOVELS

The word *Rasa* is resultant from the root '*rasah*' meaning sap or juice, taste, flavor, enjoyment. The Extort of a fruit is referred to as '*rasa*,' which itself is the core of it, the crucial flavor of it. The 6th and 7th chapters of the *Natyashastra*, identified as the *Rasadhyaya* and *Bhavaadhyaya* respectively, collectively convey the idea of the *Bhava-Rasa* theory of Bharata, and have hence become the foundation for all negotiations on aesthetics, as well as the most sparkling involvement of *Abhinavaguptacharya*, whose *Abhinavabharati* remnants till date the best explanation on the *Natyashastra*.

Grief--'*Soka*,'-is the dominant emotion, which is developed to the state of *Karuna Rasa (tragic)* pathetic sentiment. The loss of dear ones, through partition or death is the *Alambans*, the objects which cause grief to mankind. The memory of the departed ones is the excitants of the grief of the character and his suffering, pain and disappointment etc., the excitants of grief of the audience or the readers, grumbling etc. are the consequents of this emotion.

The primacy of the sentiment of pity or *Karuna Rasa (tragic)* *Rasa* has been acknowledged both in the east and the west; in the western

literature tragedy is considered greater to the humor. In tragedy there is supremacy of mercy along with fear. In Eastern literature, though there is no commencement of tragedy, yet the enormous writers, like *Bhavbhooti*, consider the pathetic emotion to be the supreme emotion. As the leading emotion of Karuna Rasa (tragic) is a painful one, namely grief, hence it should give pain to readers or spectators, not enjoyment. Then, how it is the medium of delight in literature remains a question. Aristotle talks of beneficial happiness that we receive as tragic relief and Indian aesthetics talk about delight in *Karuna Rasa (tragic)*.

The predicament of human isolation and Karuna Rasa (tragic) is a pervasive theme that has not been sufficiently studied in Thomas Hardy's fiction. This study investigates the theme of Karuna Rasa (tragic) focusing on Hardy's major novels. Although the term 'Karuna Rasa (tragic)' is one of the most outstanding features of this time, it is not very clear what it precisely means. The writer has to draw extensively on Hegel, Marx, Fromm and other thinkers to understand the complex ramifications of the term. The numerous connections in which the term has been used are restricted to include only a few meanings and applications among which the most important refers to a disparity between one's society and one's spiritual interests or welfare.

The theme of Karuna Rasa (tragic), then, is investigated in representative texts from the wide trajectory of Victorian literature. It is

clear that the central intellectual characteristic of the Victorian age is, as Arnold diagnosed it, 'the sense of want of correspondence between the forms of modern Europe and its spirit'. The increasing difficulty of reconciling historical and spiritual perspectives has become a major theme for Hardy and other late Victorians.

The greatest Victorian writers were the severest social critics. The "alien" visions of Tennyson, Arnold, Dickens, Carlyle and Pater to name some of the most obvious, come immediately to mind; and these authors are Hardy's most important predecessors as social critics. But Hardy differs from them in the intensity of his scrutiny and in his persistence in telling the Victorians profoundly disturbing truths about their values and society which they did not want to hear. David De Laura understood this when he wrote that Hardy was warning his contemporaries *that "they had not imagined the human consequences of honestly living out the modernist premises."*¹ Hardy's eye is consistently on *"the painful exigencies of modernism, its human cost, and not on its liberating effects"*.² Examining the Karuna Rasa (tragic) of the individual in the late nineteenth century, Hardy presents the costs emphatically and repeatedly. Thus the most salient distinction between Hardy's novels and the darker works of, say, Dickens is that, in novel after novel, Hardy's protagonists refuse to endure paralysis and emotional deprivation; and they instead

make choices that prove self-destructive and ultimately alienate them from themselves and from their society.

Each of Hardy's major novels is given a chapter in which the theme of Karuna Rasa (tragic) is traced. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Boldwood's neurotic and self-destructive nature makes him obsessed with Bathsheba, and as a result, murders Troy and suffers the isolation of life imprisonment; Fanny Robin's tragic and lonely death, only assisted by a dog, is a flagrant indictment of society.

In *The Return of the Native*, Clym is the earliest prototype in Hardy's fiction of alienated modern man. He returns to Egdon Heath only to live in isolation unable to communicate with the very people whom he thought of as a cure for his Karuna (tragic) . Eustacia has consistently been leading a life of Karuna (tragic) in Egdon Heath which leads to her suicide.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Henchard's Karuna (tragic) may be more ascribed to his own character, recalling Boldwood, than to strangeness with society. Yet Hardy emphasizes the propensity of society towards modernity which Henchard cannot cope with.

In *The Woodlanders*, not only does wild personality be unsuccessful to be rejuvenation and creative force but also human nature fails to be talkative and assuring. The people of Little Hintock fail to exchange a few words with other. The relationship between Marty and

Giles is an 'thwarted connection'; Giles dies a sacrificial death, and Marty ends as a wreck in a rare scene hardly believable in a newly rising world. Fitzpiers and Mrs Charmond, on the other hand, are isolated in the sterile enclosed space of their own fantasies. Grace, anticipating Tess and Sue, is torn in a disagreement between two worlds, neither of which can happily contain her.

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess, after her early day's experiences at Marlott and later at Trantridge, soon discovers how repressive culture is, predominantly when she is discarded by Angel, whom she loves and through whom she aspires to fulfill herself. Angel suffers from self-division in his character, and the divergence between conventional attitudes and superior ideas leaves him a personification of an estranged man hardly able to reunite the ethics of two worlds.

Jude the Obscure is Hardy's most complete expression of *Karuna* (tragic). Jude's *Karuna* (tragic) is clearly social and completely cosmic, and his breakdown to identify himself in humanity initiates a most important subject matter of the novel. The novel foreshadows the contemporary themes of collapse, irritation, uselessness, dissension, separation, rootlessness, and silliness as unavoidable situations of life.

In his autobiography, Hardy records a great many incidents which, taken together, help us better to understand the formation of his idiosyncratic imagination and to account for the pervasiveness of *Karuna*

Rasa (tragic) in his novels and poetry. For all its miscellaneous character, entries that provide a basis for seeing Hardy clear, though not whole, and despite recent discussion about the omissions and distortions of *The Life*, it remains a valuable and indispensable source of information about Hardy's youthful experiences and emotions. There is enough of what he encountered and felt to acquaint us with his art.

The roots of Hardy's interest in Karuna Rasa (tragic) may go back to the time of his birth - when he was literally cast aside as dead and survived only because of the midwife's carefulness. Michael Millgate reports that the infant was "*so lacking in motion and discernible intelligence*"³ that his mother soon was convinced she had given birth to an idiot, and Hardy's parents, fearing the weakly child was unlikely to live, took little interest in him, and feared to make any great emotional commitment to him. That incident early in *The Life*, where Hardy lies on his back, looking through his straw hat at the sun, prefigures the strain of melancholy that permeates almost all his works and recalls particularly *Jude*. Deeply sensitive to the sufferings of the physically weak and to how useless he was, Hardy concluded that he did not wish to grow up or meet new people. The feeling of personal worthlessness intermittently pursued "*Thomas the Unworthy*"⁴, as he called himself throughout the life and self-defamation may account for the weak attachment to life in most

of his characters, who easily succumb to death when they cannot appease their feelings of guilt.

Hardy's early sense of unworthiness and his desire not to grow was rejection of a self unfit for the struggle for survival. It was virtually rejection of his life. Early in life, Hardy reflected on a world that neglects us, a world full of 'agony, darkness, death also'. In the poem "Tess's Lament", the narrator speaks for Hardy's major fictional characters.

Though some critics may be suspicious of biographical criticism I believe that in the treatment of a topic like Karuna Rasa (tragic), it is particularly illuminating to draw on Hardy's personal life. I do not say that Hardy's novels and poetry are simply a reflection of his personal difficulties; they are something more than that, and this element is of major critical importance.

Hardy's native psychological disposition was reinforced by his reading. He was familiar with the world's great literature of pain and suffering the Old Testament, Greek tragedy, Shakespeare, and the traditional ballads. He never forgot the ballad "The Outlandish Knight", which he first heard at a harvest supper.

Hardy is like a prophet, crying out in the wilderness of modern life to a community threatened by the "ache" of modernism. He is an "intellectual deliverer", in the sense Matthew Arnold intended in his essay "The Modern Element in Literature", one who contemplates and

communicates the spirit of the age. A skeptic by temperament, Hardy early learned to admire Milton, Gibbon, Shelley and John Stuart Mill. His critical bent took shape under the social protests of Saturday Review and he received with enthusiasm what many of his contemporaries felt were the "subversive" works of Darwin, Huxley and the authors of Essays and Reviews. Hardy's genius and his reading made him welcome the awakening of the modern spirit. He would be a prophet; he wrote to Mrs. Henniker that *"If you mean to make the world listen to you, you must say now what they will all be thinking and saying five and twenty years hence and if you do that you must offend your conventional friends."*⁵

At the very heart of Hardy's greatest writing is a sense of the fragility of man's life and the extreme suffering of human beings. Life in a Godless, absurd universe is cruel; for many of its victims, Hardy repeatedly stated, it would have been better had they never been born. And while Hardy seems to understand man's erotic impulse, what in Tess he calls the "inherent will to enjoys", there is so little for many of his characteristic to enjoy that their attachment to life becomes very slender. The comment in Jude the Obscure about the 'coming universal wish not to live' is made not only in connection with the unnaturally gloomy Little Father Time but also is meant to include Hardy's long-evolving sensitivity to modern man's declining zest for life and his conviction that

thought was robbing existence of its joyousness and making life a heavy burden.

In this respect, Hardy may have been affected by the Romantic poets who viewed life as purgatorial, a state of no life and no death in which the individual remains aware of "the irreversible division between his present self which is dying and his self of the instant past which is already dead. Hardy may have been influenced by Schopenhauer whose view of tragedy necessitates the surrender of life, or at least of the will to live, as the ultimate outcome of long suffering. Increase in consciousness of man's severance from all that is not himself, in other words, leads to a submissive acceptance of absolute separation, of death as the only mode of non-existence.

Throughout Hardy's major novels the tension is generally between the demands of nature and the demands of civilization, between the unrestrained expression of life on the one hand and the stifling norms of society on the other. The dilemma experienced by Sue, Jude, Tess, Angel, Grace and Clym makes them realize that it is "a mishap to be alive". Absolutely essential to recognition of the wish not to live is the recognition of one's Karuna Rasa (tragic), of consciousness of self in opposition to the consciousness of the rest of existence with increased awareness of the self comes increased awareness of the other as enemy. His ability to enter into a wide variety of modes of being underlies the

basic structure of his novels. There are, broadly speaking, three kinds of characters in Hardy's novels.

Characters who suffer from the "ache of modernism", they are alienated from society because of the disparity between their ideals and the social norms - Tess, Angel, Sue, Jude, Henchard, (Clym), Grace, are all alienated in the Hegelian sense. On account of their own dreams and desires, they strike a discordant note, feel lonely and alienated, reel or revolt under the blows of Fate, sink in despair, ascribe their misfortunes to the contrivance of some malicious Being, wish never to have been born in such a defective world, and talk now and then of committing suicide. Jude is the most sensitive of this group of Hardy's characters; he embodies the conflicts that cripple him. Tess depicts the increasing oppression of society on individuals by thwarting the ability of distinctive individuals to realize their best selves and by barring the expression of individual goodness by insisting on the letter of the law. Hardy's concern with the individual emanates from his sense of society's unaccommodating attitude to individuals. Sue's idea that laws ought to be adjusted according to individual needs is Hardy's own theory; he wrote to the Parisian paper, *L'Ermitage*, in 1893: Hardy's protagonists are not defeated only by society but by individual failings, misperceptions and weaknesses as well.

The second groups of characters are those through whom Hardy thinks. They display a compassionate outlook that gives them an ability to place the needs of another above their own self-interest, but their most characteristic quality is an ability to endure. They can accept and bear conditions about them, whether good or bad, with a kind of equanimity. They do not rail at the universe or perform impulsive acts. They are heroic in that, by the virtue of their spiritual strength, survive intact the ordeals and tribulations which would break the average man. They substitute self-abnegation for self-indulgence, renunciation for overreaching ambition, resignation that restores harmony between man and the conditions of his being, in place of the revolt of the previous group. Bathsheba's reactions to Gabriel Oak may help to illustrate the qualities of this second group.

This group includes such characters as Elizabeth-Jane, Gabriel Oak, Diggory Ven, Thomasin, and Clym in the later stage of his life. These characters are alienated, and they realize the disparity between themselves and the external world, but they deliberately have eliminated the gulf that had separated them from society, and, consequently, have attained universality, as Hegel says, by conforming to the social substance.

The third groups of characters are the simple rustics blissfully unaware of the painful human condition, happy with the world, never

looking beyond the boundaries of Wessex. Critics have shown widespread disagreement on the subject of Hardy's rustics, some cautiously asserting, others emphatically denying their documentary reality.

Hardy's peasants are often shrewd and rarely suffer severe physical hardships. They have but slightly diverged from Nature. Their limited wants do not conflict with the silent universe. 'Now 'tis very odd, but I never feel lonely - no, not at all,' says Grandfer Cattle wondering at Mrs Yeobright's acute feeling of loneliness in *The Return of the Native*. They stand for the average humanity who toils with endurance through life enjoying the bliss of ignorance. They eat and drink and talk without a touch of melancholy. Over the dead body of Fanny, Coggan says in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 'Drink, shepherd, and be friends, for tomorrow we may be like her' at which Mark Clark drinks greedily and sings. Christopher Coney in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* digs up 'four ounce pennies' buried in the garden after Susan Henchard's death in accordance with her last wish, and spends them on liquor. When charged with 'Cannibalism' by his fellow rustics for thus disrespecting the dead, he declares:

Hardy wrote in *Dorsetshire Labourer*, *"It is among such communities as these that happiness will find her last refuge upon earth, since it is among them that a perfect insight into the conditions of*

existence will be longest postponed."⁶ Clym's tragedy is that he has come to teach 'how to breast the misery' to those who are already at peace with themselves and the world.

In conclusion, the theme of Karuna Rasa (tragic) in the major novels of Thomas Hardy is a pervasive one. Nevertheless, not all his characters are alienated; however their happy condition, like that of the rustics in Gray's *Elegy*, is seen to stem from their intellectual limitations.

References

1. David De Laura, "The Ache of Modernism", *ELH*, 34 (1967), p. 399
2. *Ibid.* p 396
3. Michael Miligate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography*, p. 16.
4. F.E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* : London , Macmillan 1962 P. 200
5. Thomas Hardy, *An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress and Other Stories*, ed. Pamela Dalziel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.5. Subsequent page references are to this edition.
6. Thomas Hardy *'The Dorsetshire Labourer'* essay, vol. II of *Longman's Magazine*, in July 1883 p.12