CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Hardy gave up writing novels towards the end of the nineteenth century and devoted the last phase of his literary career mostly to the writing of poetry. It is probably because of the fact that he wrote most of his poems in 20th century that there is often a tendency among the reviewers of modern English literature to treat him as a modern poet rather than as a modern novelist. This seems to have done little justice to the modern element in Hardy's novels. The real position, it seems to me, is that Hardy is modern both as a poet and as a novelist. Date does not necessarily make an author modern. It is not the most important factor to be reckoned with. To be modern an author should evince certain intrinsic qualities capable of illuminating some area of contemporary interest. One may be a man of the past, yet one may be modern provided the attitude expressed and the problems dealt with are peculiarly in tune with the spirit of the age we live in. In other words, to determine how far a writer is modern, we need not necessarily take his date of birth into account. What matters most is not his chronological placement, but what he believes, feels and says. If his ideas, attitudes and reflections of life are well within the general framework of modern sensibilities and thoughts and beliefs, and if the problems he focuses are of general topical and contemporary interest, he is undoubtedly a modern writer.
G. S. Fraser observes: "When we describe a work as "modern", we are ascribing certain intrinsic qualities to it, though we may be vague in our minds about what these qualities are. Thus the question of date need not arise at all". 1. By date Thomas Hardy is a Victorian, for he was born on June 2, 1840, but in mind and spirit he is unquestionably modern. More than any other of his Victorian contemporaries, he was found to have shown the seeds of modernism the result of which we have been harvesting today. Hardy may rightly be called the last of the Victorians and the first of the moderns.

Thomas Hardy adopted the technique of his age, but in his mental make-up he was far removed from it. He adopted the narrative method of his age in his novels and stories. A story is after all a story; and it is to be told in the form of a story. His plot construction is almost like that of Fielding, Thackeray and Dickens; but in his ideas he was modern. His ideas about marriage, love, sex, religion and faith are definitely in advance of his time. They are modern; they are those of our own time. In an age of 'Doctrines of Authority' Hardy was not influenced by any dogma or doctrine and retained his integrity unto the last. Again, the attitude of life expressed by Hardy, the problems dealt with by him and his disillusioned view of every human situation are quite in keeping with the problems of the modern age - its anxiety and interrogation,

its frustration and futility, its sorrows and sickness and its doubt and scepticism. Charles Morgan says:

"The modern attitude is not of protest against the brevity of life but of complaint against its sickness... The predominant note is of futility and vertigo. Ours is not an age of faith; our poets, for the most part, have lost the power to offer, and our mechanised millions have lost the power to accept, a promise of another world either as a compensation for the suffering of this or as fulfilment of its experience." 1

The views of life expressed by Thomas Hardy are shared by far more people at the present day than they were when he expressed them. His plays, poems, stories and especially his novels are far more popular today than they were in his own age. In this nuclear age, in this age of atomic and hydrogen bomb, missile and rocket, when life is less certain, and is generally lived in an atmosphere of hustle and restlessness, of uncertainty and bewilderment, Hardy is a continuous source of strength to face inevitable sorrows of life and to endure them with fortitude. Defeat is the inevitable conclusion of man's struggle for existence; and yet Hardy's men and women fight and are never daunted or discouraged. A Henchard, a Jude, a Tess, a Balthazar, a Clym Yeobright, and a Sue Bridehead are overwhelmingly conscious of the futility of their struggle.

Yet they do not give it up, if not physically, at least in spirit. They teach us to face the grimness of life with courage and endurance. So is the immense popularity of Thomas Hardy in modern times. Truly says Ifor Evans:

"In the European war of 1914-18 he (Hardy) was read with pleasure as one who had the courage to portray life with the grimness that it possessed and in portraying it not to lose pity. Often in times of stress Hardy's art will function in a similar way and so enter into the permanent tradition of our literature." 1

To ascertain how wholly modern Hardy is, how immediate his opinions and how contemporary his appeals are, it is enough to have a glance at The Dynasts, 'a vast international tragedy' dealing with the Napoleonic wars. Hardy himself calls it a "Great Historical Calamity, or Clash of Peoples, artificially brought about some hundred years ago". 2 Here, the motives of war and its meaninglessness have been fully exposed, probably, to the great satisfaction of those who are against wars. Again, certain impersonated abstractions called "Phantom Intelligences" comprising Spirits, Fruits, Ironies, besides contrasted Choruses, have been introduced almost as the presiding presences in the war literature of the contemporary world.

2. Thomas Hardy : Preface to The Dynasts written in Sept 1903 (Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London 1903) P.VII
These phantasmal intelligences are in fact the supernatural spectators of the terrestrial action. Hardy says: "In point of literary form, the scheme of contrasted choruses and other conventions of this external feature was shaped with a single view to the modern expression of a modern outlook, and in frank divergence from classical and other dramatic precedent which ruled the ancient voicing of ancient themes." 1.

The other most common instance of modern elements in Hardy is his own description of Clym Yeobright at the beginning of the third Book of The Return of the Native. It is a plain and direct statement of what Hardy himself believed to be the characteristic feature of the modern man. Clym is the representative of Hardy's idea of the race of modern men, of the race of the future man. Clym or for that matter any of the modern men cannot feel quite happy in the conventional way. Being disillusioned by the inherent defects of natural laws, they are in a dilemma and they bear a disturbed countenance. "That old-fashioned revelling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quandary that man is in by their operation." 2.

1. Thomas Hardy: Preface to The Dynasts written in Sept 1903 (Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London 1903) P. IX

This is indeed a statement of the disillusioned view of life which is now a thing of common acceptance to us. Certainly no 'revelling' is possible in the modern situation of the modern times. There may probably be a variety of Victorian forms of complacency, and one of them was certainly a refuge for men to hide from themselves, from their own guilty conscience and from one another. Unlike his contemporaries, Hardy was unusual in that he did never resort to hiding. Hardy boldly expressed his doubts and fears aloud and indirectly opposed the happy oblivion of the people who preferred to be complacent. Hardy was thus a rebel, almost a lone voice of protest against Victorian convention. He protested against the Victorian frame of mind (complacency, compromise, and in short the comedy of life). He wished to stress the laws of conflict, strife and tragedy in almost every human situation.

Of course, in some of his early novels Hardy moves with convention. Far From the Madding Crowd, for instance, which is one of his early novels, has a happy ending, though without its attendant comic laughter and cheer. After passing through many vicissitudes of life, there is after all union between Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak at the end. However, in his later novels, such as, The Return of the Native, The Woodlanders, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure the convention of happy ending has been defied. It is in this defiance of the Victorian convention of smug complacency and compromise that Hardy exhibits revolutionary spirit symbolic of modern spirit.
Having revolted against the spirit of his time, Hardy, almost alone among the Victorian novelists, took the tragic view of life. Some of his contemporaries, however, shared with him to a certain degree his sense of tragedy - George Eliot and Emily Bronte for instance. But both of them had their own way of escape. George Eliot, for instance, could by-pass it by her moral earnestness and Emily Bronte by her spiritual ecstasy. To Hardy alone, the tragic view of life, or the sad unchanging pattern of life, was the complete and final truth. Man struggles, man suffers. He is informed by religion of the reasons of his sorrows and sufferings and he gets consolation that his sorrows and sufferings are worth-while. But when man has lost faith in religion, the tortures and troubles with which he is agonised and tormented, seem to be the work of a malevolent and dangerous demon that informs the universe. As Bonamy Dobree observes: "To Hardy this sort of terror seemed a completely modern product, which could not have been until a new type of man was born into the world." 1

A modern man, even in an overcrowded city of modern life, tends to feel lonely. The desire for loneliness, we may suppose, is partly due to the disquietude, discontent and despondency which have been constantly haunting the men of the modern age. In this context certain

observations of Dean Inge are worth quoting. According to him, it is an age of profound disquiet, in which we have been reaping the fruits of false philosophy of life initiated by the Industrial Revolution. "I have, I suppose", Dr. Inge says at the conclusion of his essay on Our Present Discontents, "made it clear that I do not consider myself specially fortunate in having been born in 1880 and that I look forward with great anxiety to the journey through life which my children will have to make." 1 This fashion of obsessive anxieties has become natural to modern men and women. It is collective in character. Charles Morgan observes in this connection: "The most dangerous of modern anxieties is collective - a sense, which some have, that they are passengers in a runaway train which is carrying them so fast and so uncontrollably into an abyss that to look at the view has become meaningless. To this anxiety of Collective Disaster we give many names - war, atomism, communism, slump and even, if we are fashionable intellectuals, existentialism - but under any name it has the same effect. It is a negation of the present. It takes the taste out of life. It makes an absurdity of faith, and of love an excretion."2. Hardy foreshadowed the same corroding anxiety about the ultimate future of men on earth.

1. Five Essays by Dean Inge: Our Present Discontents: Edited by E.A. Wedehouse (Orient Longmans Ltd; Bombay 1930) P. 6
It should not however be misconstrued that discomfort, despondency, doubt, skepticism, war, uncertainty, conflict, strife and tragedy are the only features of the modern age. The tendencies of the modern age are indeed many and varied. They can hardly be compressed into one firm, final phraseology. Yet, at any rate, it can be said that along with modern anxieties there are also certain redeeming modern beliefs manifest in its humanism, socialism, patriotism, and democracy; scientific investigation, tolerance, secularism, liberalism and spontaneous pity at the spectacle of human suffering.

It is Hardy's spontaneous pity, his profound charity and his infinite tolerance, which are his outstanding characteristics. Thackeray resembled Hardy in that he tried to expose social hypocrisies. But Thackeray had nothing spiritual about him. All that he had was no more than his sense of urbanity. Dickens, of course, had a deep well of pity. But for Dickens pity had the preference of being exercised only in the deserving cases, and was not to be misused for those unworthy of it. To Hardy alone it was quite the reverse. He extended his pity for the deplorable, for the ugly and the unworthy. In all conditions of human frailty, folly, failure and frustration, the feeling heart of Hardy seemed to have ached in full sympathy. Hardy had shown his benignity to all those who seemed to have sinned according to the commonplace standard of good conduct. To Jude's carnality, Henchard's doggedness,
Eustacia's sensuousness, Tess's disastrous lie and Sue's defeated courage, Hardy awarded "full dignity of pain."
Thus Hardy was like Dostoevsky who is chiefly the source of modern tolerance. Before Hardy's advent to English literature heroines were usually presented as rather idealised persons and they all held that marriage was more important than love. Hardy, however, turned the table.
In his hand they remain what they really are. They were no longer perfect, but did not cease to be good. On behalf of his women and for the sake of a realistic art, Hardy in fact went a long way to deny the social, religious and moral convention of his time.

With the help of the modern method of self analysis and self criticism and with their sense of futility that overshadows the entire world as a sequel to the deepening of the crisis of materialism ("man's own consciousness of futility" - as Bonamy Dobree observes. 1), the children of Hardy, his men and women seem quite real men and women of the world to-day. To them love seems a passion often carried to a climax by the complexities of women rather than men. To both his men and women sometimes love is spiritual, sometimes physical and sometimes it is a fascination tinged with material considerations. More often love translates itself into marriage; but marriage is however no guarantee of happiness. In most cases marriage thwart the very purpose of love, yet Hardy's

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characters seem to be typically English in the sense that for them love and marriage almost always go hand in hand. Moreover, marriage which happens as a corollary of love, takes place in most cases more at the insistence of his men than of his women. Nevertheless, marriage is secondary and love is primary. There are again some who cannot but love and be loved always - Bystacia Yye, for instance. By the exhibition of this unconventional love, of the complex nature of love, Hardy has certainly freed us from the conventional morality of the 19th century tradition of literature which did not allow people to reveal the whole of their mind, not allow them to express what was thought to be improper and indecorous, even though real. The 19th century literature stood mostly for big events, events informed by a stamp of idealism. But "let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small" - as Mrs. Virginia Woolf observes. In fact, life exists both in big and small events, in the beautiful and the ugly, in the good and the bad. Hardy, being one of the first of moderns, also realises it and gives it a modern expression of life and love in their varied forms and living complexities, bringing together into a meaningful pattern - the virtue and the vice, the big and the small, and the fine and the coarse. It is,

in other words, the totality of life that matters in Hardy. Life, as he sees it, lights up an entire consciousness. It does not consist of a few detached high-lights but is all-embracing and it illuminates every point and gives to his (Hardy's) whole creation a varied, yet unified character, where the significant and the insignificant are all in their proper place and are all equally lighted up.

Hardy's novels show that to his suffering characters, to the victims of chance and choice, life offers a sense of universal dislocation. Nevertheless, the Hardian heroes have a strong inclination to be firmly rooted to their natural soil; they seem to represent it in its various moods and aspects in all kinds of weather. This sort of attachment to one's own soil represents Hardy's idea of patriotism, of love of one's own land.

Further, the humanist in Hardy may be indifferent to Christianity but cannot be indifferent to Christian charity. Basically Hardy is not an atheist but a humanist, and his humanism consists in his deep sympathy with the spectacle of human sufferings, specially with the sufferings of the dispossessed and the down-trodden. Every fall is a loss of human potential, for which Hardy's heart bleeds in pity and sympathy. Even those who have sinned consciously are also not denied of his pity and sympathy. Henchard, Eustacia, Sue, Jude, Bathsheba, Tess, Clym, Angel Clare are open to
serious lapses and dangerous faults of their own. Yet, Hardy locks upon them with great compassion. This is the instance of Hardy's humanism.

Thus Hardy's life-view has its roots in modern times, and modern beliefs - belief in the dignity of man and in democracy; belief in the operation of the blind forces called the Immanent Will and in the utter futility of his struggle; and also a faith in life which is got to be endured and not avoided. Hardy's men - Henchard, Jude, Clym, Gabriel Oak etc. are commonplace and ordinary, far removed from aristocracy. So also are his women - Elizabeth, Bathsheba, Sue, Arabella, Tess, Eustacia, Thomasin, Marty South etc. They represent lower middle or at best the middle stratum of society. This is the result of the modern democratic spirit which does not place any undue importance on rank, position and family pedigree.

Again, Hardy's outlook is unquestionably secular in the sense that it is not concerned with man's relation with God. Most of all, it is concerned with the view of the universe as governed by an impersonal power known as Immanent Will. It controls and conditions the human world as the laws of nature controls the physical world. It is a blind unconscious power quite oblivious of the infinite human miseries. This is apt to create a feeling of frustration and futility and creates, in turn, the profound pity for all that man has to suffer and endure by the petty spite of chances. This attitude is more or less akin to the modern scientific attitude which sees the universe under the power and influence of the impersonal laws of
nature, against which nothing avails. An attitude like this is indeed an attitude of the modern times. In the past ages men had greater faith in Providence and then even the greatest tragedy was looked upon as having a high moral purpose. Far from any moral purpose, for Hardy the purpose which is utilitarian in spirit, practical in its applicability and modern in conception, is not to justify the ways of God to man, but to establish the intrinsic worth, the characteristic greatness and the essential dignity of man. This is in harmony with the modern religion of man. As Bonamy Dobree rightly observes: "Hardy's tragic net is essentially a product of modernity."

It is thus that Hardy as a writer of novels belonging to the late 19th century, should be regarded as a writer exhibiting a modern mind and modern outlook. Hardy, of course, shared some of the faults of his time mostly manifest in his curiously pompous choice of words and fondness for classical allusions which are now old fashioned and appear almost a pedantry. Yet, they do not hamper our enjoyment of his novels. For, Hardy's vision is so intense that he makes us share it with him, and consequently whatever faults which he was subjected to seem insignificant and immaterial. We attend to whatever he has to tell us, we share his wisdom, his insight, his vision and his charity. The impact of Hardy's story of human "drama of pain"

is most immediate to every modern reader. "Had the case been otherwise", as Rimund Blunden observes, "there would never have been such a number of pilgrimages into Dorset by those who found their best moods realised in many a favourite page of Hardy’s old England." 1. In fact, Thomas Hardy represents the very spirit of the present age.

In Victorian age Hardy was much discussed but less understood. In modern age, however, the more he is discussed the better and much better he is being understood; and so Hardy is now on a rising tide of popularity. Dwelling upon his growing popularity in recent years, Richard Carpenter observes that Hardy will continue to be esteemed as a great English novelist who looked at life boldly and told the most unpleasant truth for what he felt about life and living in this world. "If one asks the Hardy scholars, one hears that Hardy is being more and more recognised for his true worth and that he is emerging as one of the three or four master novelists in English literature." 2. Literary reputation is, however, of fluctuating nature, depending upon too many variables; it is like a stock exchange in which a large number of imponderables do play a mysterious and inscrutable part. But thanks to Hardy’s literary talent and his broad, humane outlook by virtue of which he has been able to retain today the esteem of both public and scholars alike.

In secondary schools as well as in colleges, as recorded by Mr. Carpenter, the novels of Hardy are standard reading fare, and most of his works are readily available in print. His poetry, too, is looked upon as some of the finest products of the twentieth century, and is at par with that of the noted poets like W.H. Auden "giving Hardy credit as the wellspring of their own work." There are indications that some of his minor novels, especially Under the Greenwood Tree and The Trumpet Major have been experiencing a modest revival among the reading public. Even his less read major novels, such as, The Woodlanders and Jude the Obscure are much better appreciated today than they were a few decades ago. Thus, Hardy's literary reputation has been on an ascendency; and his popularity is, indeed, his great merit.

The function of literary scholarship shown by the critics and the scholars is to make a writer popular or unpopular, to keep him alive or to bury him into oblivion. The flow of scholarship concerning Thomas Hardy, though critical and unfair in his own age, has now been successfully showing that Hardy is a great writer with truly universal qualities and with a capacity to speak to more than one age and more than one generation. The fact that he failed to share the specific attitudes and specific themes of the Victorian age does not in the least diminish

1. Richard Carpenter: Thomas Hardy
the universal qualities of his works; and his works are really enriched rather than diminished in value by what he believed and accepted. In this nuclear generation the works of Hardy anticipate a contemporary psychological interest, and in this sense Hardy appears as belonging, less to the Victorian age, but more to the age of the great masters of the past and present who have probed into the problems of human predicament on earth. "The realization that Hardy's distortions and grotesqueness are poetic, impressionistic responses to experiences and the formal pressures of art rather than failures of taste gives us more respect for his modernity." L. Hardy wrote his novels and poems out of such stuff as 'love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice'. These are the universal qualities, and these are the values which ultimately last. Hardy has put special emphasis on 'love' and 'sacrifice' because he knows it well in his artistic intuition that these are eternal. There is perhaps no more powerful and perennial theme in literature than the one adopted to make the stories of Clym, Hernseard, Giles, Tess and Jude most moving, heart-rending and universal. All of them loved but were sacrificed on the altar of love. In artistic exposition of these universal themes of 'love' and 'sacrifice' Hardy will remain always popular as long as these qualities of life retain their value for mankind.