Chapter - I

Introduction

Hardy's name always reasonates with our memories of some unforgettable women characters that he has created in some of his major novels. The best of them were victims of a patriarchal society that used a double morality for the subjection of women. Hardy was dissatisfied with the prevalent Victorian ethos that thwarted personal longings and aspirations of women, and as Richard C. Carpenter pertinently observes, 'On many sensitive issues Hardy had firm opinions which ran against the victorian current, specially on sex and marriage'(Carpenter: 1964, 24). In the Victorian society relations between the sexes were governed by a fundamental principle of subordination. The legal, social and other laws of the country were anti-woman. In his novels Hardy expresses his dissatisfaction against this oppressive social system. He was writing at a time when the presentation of *women in the novels were mostly done to uphold the values of patriarchy.* Hardy refused to compromise with these conventions, and deplored the values of this inequitable society. In his novels he, therefore, projected deviant women who try to break out of their stereotyped roles. He wanted to redefine the basis for family, sexual and marriage relationships and the role of women in society. As Anne Z. Mickelson says,' "His approach is often searching, *sometime speculative, frequently perceptive and always compassionate*' (Mickelson:1976,X).Rosemarie Morgan informs: "As a person, Hardy relished the company of women, and expressed no reservations about their powers, moral, intellectual, sexual, emotional or psychic. He was in full sympathy with *the liberal feminists of his day agitating for equal rights with men*" (*Morgan:* 1988 XI). Indeed, Hardy wielded the pen to explore and formulate an ethos alternative to the contemporary male domination. He repeatedly worked out the vision of an oppressed, usually female figure, trapped in the structure of a patriarchal society and "In doing this he broke the convention of feminine presentation and threatens the status quo, hitting at the very structure and foundation of society itself" (Morgan: 1988 , XII).

No wonder, Hardy's female characters attracted attention of the critics from the very beginning. His earlier critics have demonstrated that his characters were the victim of some supernatural interference. During 1970's and 80's critics turned their attention away from the cosmic indifference to foucs on the role of social processes in determining the fates of the characters, especially of the women, in his novels. Some critics discerned Schopenhauer's influence on Hardy's women. Penny Boumelha informs that recent critics have followed one of the two paths : "Either they have accused Hardy of entrapment in conventional views about women and their spheres of action or else they have remarked on his particular interest in and sympathy with women" (Boumelha:1982 :2). Virginia Woolf anticipated an important aspect emphasised in modern feminist cirticism by pointing out a basic division in Hardy's depiction of female and male characters. Kathleen Rogers concludes from her study of Hardy's women that 'these novels show tenacity of sexist assumptions even in so humane and enlightened a man as Hardy' (Rogers: 1975, 57). Patricia Ingham examines Hardy's frustrations with the inadequacy of available literary and sexual images which results in tension in the portrayal of women between ideal and received form. During the 1940's and 1950's with the growing influence of New Criticism and its insistence on the integrity of text, Hardy's treatment of gender was either silently accepted or praised as an integral part of the organiclly unified work of art. In this critical climate, at a time when the characters were seen as versions of real people Hardy critics began focusing on intensely personal question: whether or not Hardy had depicted realistic women, and "whether or not he understood them or liked them or was fair to them. Irving Howe in 1966 declared that Hardy had a special knack 'for creeping intuitively into the emotional life of women" (Irving Howe: 1966, 109-108). In 1976 Anne Z. Mickelson in her book Thoms Hardy's Men and Women : The Defeat of Nature, argues that "Hardy' anticipates much of the thinking in the 1970's on men and women, specially on women', and that his approach to the role of women in society is 'often searching, sometimes speculative, frequently perceptive and always compassionate" (Mickelson:1976,2) .

Rosalind Miles praised Hardy for his ability to bring "his female characters so fully to life as women before us" (Rosalind Miles: 1979,26). Miles also maintains how Hardy's relationship with several women made him supremely understanding of women in general and aided him in the sympathetic and vibrant depiction of his realistic female characters. Rosemarie Morgan in her book, Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (1988) sees Hardy as transcending the gender stereotypes of his time in order to create "active, assertive, self-determined women' and 'their frustrating struggle to define themselves in a world that deny them the right to shape their own lives, control their own bodies, explore their own needs and express their own desires" (Morgan 1988 XII & X). Robert Langbaum's Thomas Hardy in our own Time, (1995) placed Hardy between George Eliot and D.H. Lawrence for his exploration of the unconscious and sexuality. Penny Boumelha's Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual ideology and Narrative form (1982), insists on the radicalism of Hardy's portrayal of women. Boumelha saw Hardy's women as cultural signs, representation of historical ideas about women and gender. Boumelha offered a historical analysis of Victorian society in order to understand the contemporary 'sexual ideology' and Hardy's use of it in his narratives. For Boumelha, 'the radicalism of Hardy's representation of women resides, not in their 'complexity', their realism and or their challenge to convention' but in their resistance to reduction to a single and uniform ideological position' (Boumelha: 1982,7). Patricia Ingham in her book Thomas Hardy (1990) comments that in Hardy's early novels, 'women begin, occasionally, to experience themselves as different from the models accepted by themselves as well as others, with a sense of enhanced, not diminished, self'(Ingham:1989,7) . As a result a 'new and problematic space' opens up around the female signifier 'which is tentatively and varyingly mapped by each sex'(ibid).

Recently some Marxist critics have analysed Hardy's women characters and they include in their analyses ideas about gender. In these studies attention is given not only to female characters but also to the relationship between femininity and power. John Goode (1988) demonstrates

on the way how the narrative mode exposes the ideology which motivates and shapes a text. However, from the brief survey of Hardy criticism presented above it can easily be found that Hardy's women characters cannot be analysed from a single dimension but an account of contemporary intellectual and ideological cross-currents is also necessary for a proper understanding of their complexity. Hardy's women characters are the products of the dominant ideological position of the Victorian England. Thomas Hardy was intellectually alert to the changing social system of his time. The changing pattern of the themes of his later novels is a clear evidence of it. His characters are duly shaped by the various conflicts and contradictions arising from this changing society. Hardy was writing at a time when the 'woman question' was already articulating itself. The rise of the feminist movement in the second half of the nineteenth century was already challenging traditional views and assumptions concerning femininity and its proper role and place of women in the society. Though Hardy was not drawn to feminist movement of his day, he was deeply sympathetic towards it. Let us trace briefly these changing intellectual perspectives that might have shaped or influenced Hardy's mind.

Feminism has its roots in the struggle for women's right which began late in the eighteenth century more particularly with Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of woman (1792). Later came American Margaret Fuller's Women in the Nineteenth Century (1845) and John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women (1869). Then the suffrage movement at the beginning of the twentieth century carried on the campaign. So for a brief while let us look back upon the late eighteenth century for perspectives on the roots of modern feminism.

Until the eighteenth century European societies were restricted to a feudal systems of kings, big land owning nobles and clerics ruling over small scale artisans, merchants and peasants. Work was mostly done close to home, on the farm or in the workshop. Although their task and pay were different men and women worked together. But then the spread and development of manufacturing industries and bigger cities began separating

work from home, men's work from women's and creating for the first time the idea of the male bread winner and economically dependent house wife.

The growth of industrialization gave birth to a new social class -- the landless labourer and the rising urban middle class. New insecurities created a new thirst for freedom. By the mid-eighteenth century an international group of enlightened thinkers had begun to challenge the tyranny of feudal societies based on the inherited privileges of Kings. These enlightened critics opposed the ancient regime and offered supports for the Rights of Man. They vocalized the dissatisfaction of a new and growing middle class, eager for progress and fed up with the inequalities of an old, rigid and corrupt feudal hierarchy. Amid this ferment, women began to raise the question of their inequality and to challenge the domestic tyranny of men. What is interesting to note hare is that Jacques Rousseau, one of the chief enlightened thinkers spoke against women's emancipation from domestic tyranny. He favoured the patriarchal family with absolute authority residing in the husband. In Emile (1762) this was what he wrote:

> Men and women made for each other but their mutual dependence is not equal. We could survive without them better than they could without us. They are dependent on our feeling, on the price we put on their merits, on the value we set on their attractions and on their virtues. Thus women entire education, should be planned in relation to men , to please men, to be useful to them, to win their love and respect, to raise their children, to care for them as adults, counsel and console them to make their life sweet and pleasant (quoted in S.A. Watkins, M. Rueda : 1992,14).

But Locke's view of marriage was liberal one. He conceived of marriage as a contract between free persons which implied equal rights to both men and women. The contract marriage suggested wife's submissiveness to her husband in exchange for his undertaking of love, affection, fidelity and care. The individualist, social and political theory which developed in the course of the seventeenth century and which received one of its most notable and influential expressions in John Locke's Second Treatise of Government was applied to the woman's question by Mary Wollstonecraft in the first classic work of the feminist movement, A Vindication of the Rights

of Women(1772). Before Wollstonecraft a number of women and men in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries claimed equality for women. But critics think that Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Women is the first substantial treatise in the field of feminism. Following Susan Alice Watkins we may say that 'It was the foundation stone of the modern feminism' (Susan Alice Watkins. M. Rueda, H. Rodrigues: 1992,15). Mary Wollstonecraft asserts that domestic tyranny is the main obstacle to woman's emancipation. Denial of political rights, education and equal work for woman is tyranny. Femininity is a construct. Women are born equal, yet taught to be subordinate, weak and featherheaded. Mary Wollstonecraft also argues that: 'She is brought up to be the toy of man, his rattle and must jingle in his ears whenever dismissing reason he chooses to be amused' (quoted in ibid, 15).

Wollstonecraft's clarion call in Vindication has rung down the centuries. Her demand for an end to the double standard to which women are subjected and for women's rights to independent work, education , civil and political life still form the basis of feminism today. She deplored the division of labour between bread winning husbands and their wives kept at home. She earnestly wished to see the distinction of sex abolished altogether save where love was concerned. She went so far as to suggest that women should have their own political representatives instead of being arbitrarily governed by male. However, in desiring for women a life in which they can exercise reason, Wollstonecraft has no intention of taking them out of their families. Rather she calls up in her imagination the picture of an ideal not as an equal in her own right as a free and rational being and this itself requires a different education and a different position for her in society generally.

After Mary Wollstonecraft's work important publications are Margaret Fuller's Women in the Nineteenth Century (1845) and John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women (1869). These two books also had considerable contribution to the development of liberal feminism. John Charvet, of course, likes to place Fuller in a transitional position between individualist and socialist feminism because he traces in her book the emergence of a socialist conception of the relation of the individual to the whole (J. Charvet: 1980, 23).

Margaret Fuller, an American transcendentalist and feminist stressed particularly the need for woman to be shaken out of her traditional dependence on man inorder to become self reliant, and so realize her value as a free and independent being. For this, she emphasised women's need for a much greater range of occupation than they previously had. However in some final comments Fuller moved away from the conception of the self-determining individual to the idea of a larger whole of which individual are parts. This larger whole she curiously enough calls Man, when she means Humanity. She argues that hitherto in the history of Humanity the masculine side of the whole has been most developed. Now it is the turn of the feminine principle to receive its full development. What is worthwhile to note here is that in the nineteenth century writing male-female relations were equated with that of master-slave. The analogy with slavery is already present in Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women and John Stuart Mill as he wrote in The Subjection of Women: No slave is a slave to the some length and in so full a sense of the word as wife is'(Mill 1869, 57, in K.K. Ruthven: 1985, 29).

In the Subjection of Women Mill was concerned to show that the existing relations between the sexes, the legal subordination of one sex to the other was wrong in itself. So he supported an equality of legal right, but not an equality of material position and occupation. Besides the equality of civil rights, he also spoke of women's right to vote. In the final chapter of his book, he raised directly the issues regarding the liberation of women. In his view women should be liberated because they have the capacity for self-direction.

Marx himself had relatively little to say about the oppression of women. But Friedrich Engels, his collaborator, took it up for fuller treatment. In his book The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884) he construes the man-woman relations in class terms. He argues that the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male, thus legitimating the familiar equation of husbands with the bourgeoise and wives with the proletariat: 'In the family he is bourgeois, the wife represents the proletariat' (F. Engels: 1972, 74). However, Engels envisaged that the

regulation of sex relationship would be settled after the impending effacement of capitalist mode of production. So far what is noticeable is that class, race, sex and slavery have become the dominant tropes of women's oppression, and we have two brands of feminism: Liberal or individualist feminism and socialist feminism. The aim of the individualist feminism is to attain equal civil and political rights for women within the existing structure of liberal and increasingly democratic male society, while on the other hand, socialist feminism puts more emphasis on the removal of capitalist mode of production because real liberation of women is impossible as long as power and wealth in the world is monopolized by a tiny minority, and economic and social life is ruled by their lust for profits.

While the classic individualist and socialist feminists are in agreement with the contemporary feminists in holding that women's fundamental nature is, like that of men, to be free, self informing being, at the same time they accept that woman like man, has a sexual nature expressed in specifically feminine traits and behaviour. For the nineteenth century individualist this feminine nature justifies woman's continued existence in the family as wife and mother. In complete contrast, the latter-day radical feminists denies that there is only such sexual nature of human beings. Sexually differentiated behaviour patterns, in their view, are wholly attributable to different social formations of men and women, the function of which is essentially to support the institution of male dominance or patriarchy. As a consequence, a more radical and deep rooted antagonism between men and women comes to the fore in their thought. Thus the difference between the nineteenth century liberal and contemporary radical feminists amounts to this : that the former accept a limited sexual nature as justifying appropriate roles in what is fundamentally free human life, while the latter deny any sexual nature and demand the abolition of all sexually differentiated roles in an androgynous world.

Feminist thinkers in the late eighties and nineties appeared to be redirecting their energies from specific political and legal questions towards "the formulation of new morality, a new code of behaviour and sexual ethics.

A new figure, presaging for greater upheavals, entered on the scene in the fin-de-siecle atmosphere. It was the beginning of he feminine revolt against the traditional order, the first step on the long road to emancipation. It was the harbinger of the 'sexual revolution' of the twentieth century" (Gail Cunningham: 1978, 3). To understand the revolt of the feminist avant grade against the male order, we must first of all try to trace the position of women in England during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The feminine condition in the Victorian age derived from the existence of two superimposed structures –the ancient patriarchal regime and the modern bourgeoise regime. Traditionally relations between the sexes were *governed by a fundamental principle, the subordination of woman to man.* This was the deep-rooted heritage of the age-old division of production and reproduction .The model to which social pressure made people conform or be ostracized, reflected the values and mandates of classic patriarchal society i.e. the authority of husband over wife, father over children. The Victorian bourgeoisie took up this rural model and adopted it to an urban and industrial society. At the base of this was of course the division of roles and masculine superiority. The break-up of old communal ties, the triumph of individualism and the commercial economy reinforced man's superiority in the family and in the society. Woman, on the other hand, found herself exalted and put down at the same time, when moral and religious considerations were subtly blended with economic needs.

In the Victorian period, a married woman had no separate identity from that of her husband. Many women felt keenly the discrepancy between their legal position and their actual earning power. Lee Holcombe in the essay 'Victorian Wives and Property' writes that

> By law whatever a wife earned belonged to her husband no matter how he treated her or what he *earned himself. Under the common law a husband enjoyed control over his wife's real* property and income from it during marriage. However, under the provision of a statute of 1833 a husband could set aside his wife's dower rights if he chose. If she predeceased her husband, this property went not to him but to her children or other legal heirs. On the otherhand, a woman's personal property passed into absolute possession of her husband. He could use and

dispose of it during his lifetime in any way he chose. He could also make a will disposing as he pleased of his personal property including that which had come to him from his wife. If a husband died intestate his personal property was divided according to statutory provision under which his widow never received more than half, the remainder going to his children or other near relations, or if he had none to the crown. If a wife died intestate all her personal property remained with her husband absolutely (Lee Holcombe in A Widening Sphere(ed) Martha Vicinus:1977,5).

The divorce law was not only the most blatant example of sexual discrimination, it was also costly for women. A generation earlier even the innocent wife of a broken marriage could be debarred from any access to children. Not only this, the husband was at perfect liberty to place them in the hands of his mistress. For Victorian women marriage was inevitably 'not only her highest, but her only aim on earth' because the spinster's lot was usually a most disagreeable alternative. Once married her freedoms were in some ways even more narrowly circumscribed in return for the security of a home, the name of a wife, and opportunity to enjoy the privilege of motherhood , she owed her husband almost absolute fealty . If she were disloyal to her marriage vows, if she committed adultery, no matter what her provocation or the purity of her new attachment, her social ruin was certain: She would be barred from her home and children, rejected by her own family and friends. Without a character she would be in a much worse position than even the spinster, not only totally and irremediably ostracized but unemployable in any respectable occupation. Common prostitution might very well offer her the only possibility of survival. Her husband on the other hand could expect indulgence for any infidelities he might practice. And his claims for indulgence, his demand for a double -standard in marital misconduct, would be upheld by the law of the land. The Divorce Act for example of 1857 gave a man his freedom on the mere grounds of his wife's adultery, but she was required to prove him guilty of rape, sodomy or bestiality or of adultery coupled with incest, bigamy, cruelty or desertion.

Besides the discriminatory law of property and Divorce Act, there coexisted in this society the ideology of social norms and practices. As Deblina Bandyopadhyay informs:

> It was only at the turn of the twentieth century that there was a restructuring or reassessment of the status of women. Till then, generally speaking, the accepted traditional ideology regarding women conformed to the Ruskinian conviction that a woman should be educated 'not for self -development but for self renunciation' (Ruskin, 'Queens Garden'101). It was also prescribed that woman must remain passive, dependent and chaste. She should be associated with private feelings only, living in the fantasy- world of satisfying personal relationships which belittled the daily problems of inequalities confronted by her. . . . The idea of home as the 'heaven' and the feminine within it as entertained by the bourgeoisie members of society assumed its extraordinary elevated position in victorian ideology . . . . Moreover, home was also the answer to declining religious faith as to increasing commercial stress. The moral authority of the church was being transferred to the home which was becoming the basis for 'the Religion of Humanity' (Houghton, 1964 .347) . . . . The burden of 'nursing / nurturing' this new idea of the home was bestowed on women. They became the custodians of the moral conscience, the repository of all moral virtues. According to the customary ideal, she must train herself to be a companion whose spiritual superiority, virtuous nature and domestic charm should be capable of raising the spirit of male minds from base and vulgar anxieties and cares. She must be the 'balm of distress' (Ruskin. 120-121) with the power to heal, to redeem , to guide and to guard' (ibid) (Bandyopadhyay : 2002,32-34).

The social idealists prescribed for women the roles of teacher not only to their children but morally of men, of society. They could attain such a goal by spreading the spirit of affection, selflessness, self-restraint, fidelity and purity in their various roles as mother, wife, sister, daughter, friend and teacher, nurse and advisor, servant and sanctifier -- all the different facades that may be assumed by the character of a woman but she has not been allowed to be herself . They were taught that 'meekness, submissiveness, and resignation of all individual will into the hands of man' (Mill, 1864, 16-17).Thus the victorian women were subjected to certain ideological pressures. These ideologies denied her of her human reactions, raising her to an alter of false self-image, and thereby exploiting her within the confines of the family and its routine.

In the Victorian society the ideology of female sexuality was extremely oppressive. As Bandyopadhyay says:

Victorian women had no sexual identity, and it was claimed that they have no passions and emotions except relating to their home and children. Their purity the most revered aspect of victorian womanhood, was essentially a product of sexual hypocrisy. This sexual morality held the potential danger of criminality in women and she was considered to be constantly in need of protection. The victorian society was afraid of women's sexual freedom but they were commended by the same society as guardians of high moral standards at home. Hence women were considered both irresponsible for their own action and totally responsible for these *of their family . . . . Of contemporary male opinions regarding female sexuality, there is* evidence that while Dr. William Acton denied female sexuality altogether, Havelock Ellis believe it to be only passive and chance needs to be initiated by the male partner. There was in general a repression of sexual emotions . . . . After marriage fidelity was considered to be the supreme virtue in Victorian concept of morality. The ideal of self-restraint and chastity, within and outside marriage was impinged on women rather than men. This practice gave rise to be infamous double standard of sexual morality, which punished with social ostracism those women who breached the social taboos, but which blandly ingored and therefore, surreptitiously supported male infidelity and offences (Bandyopadhyay : 2002, 34-41).

Lawrence Stone in The Family, Sex and Marriage(1977) informs :

Among the upper classes for most of the Early Modern period, 'The double standard' of sexual behaviour prevailed. According to this convention, the husband enjoyed full monopoly rights over the sexual services of his wife, who was expected to be a virgin on her wedding night. As Fielding's Mr. Modern told his wife in 1732:'your person is mine: I bought it lawfully in the church'. On the other hand, the men was expected to have a gained some sexual experience before marriage, and any infidelities after marriage were treated as venial sin which the sensible wife was advised to overlook. Thus both fornication and adultery were exclusively male prerogatives at this social level, despite the fact that in current physiological theory and folk tradition women were regarded as more lustful in their appetites and more fickle in their attachments than men. 'All witch craft comes from camal lust, which in women is insatiable', observed the authors of the Malleus Maleficarum, thus expressing no more than the conventional view. This dichotomy between women's physiological impulses and their social obligations to pre-marital chastity and post-marital monogamy was solved by the imposition on them the strictest standards of sexual behaviour, enforced by all the legal, moral and religious pressures of which the society was capable. The explanation of this discrepancy lies firstly in the value attached to female chastity in the marriage market of a hierarchical and propertied society, and secondary in the necessity that should be no legal doubts about the legitimacy of the heirs to property and title (Stone: 1977,501-2).

The double standard of sex morality was highlighted through the Contagious Discuses Act of 1866 and 1869 by which women forfeited their dignity and constitutional rights for an offence of which both the sexes were guilty , while men moved about freely, spreading the physical and social disease of immorality about them. This shows that not only were women being kept oppressed but they were also being heavily exploited by the male oriented socio-economic pattern of the age.

The victorian ideology demanded that women must be ignorant of sex knowledge .Eric Trudgill in Madonnas and Magdalens (1976) observes.

> Feminine frailty was less forgivable too because, women it seemed had far less opportunity or occasion to fall from grace .For the Victorian wife there were the snug walls of sheltered domesticity, her passionate absorption in her children, her insulation from evil by the barriers of propriety. For the Victorian husband there were the open streets where sex might be bought for a shilling .For the Victorian wife moreover there was the desexualizing nature of her upbringing, reinforcing what was considered her natural lack of appetite(Trudgill:1976,73).

Indeed, sexual passion on the part of woman was considered sexual aberration. Sex was banned from conversation, books and sights. Intercourse was meant to give pleasure to man. This hypocrisy of Victorian ideology gave rise to the conception of two types of women: Madonna and Whore. This conceptual bifurcation of women denied in them natural sex drive and any woman showing natural sexual urges were termed as 'whore' or 'fallen'. Therefore an ideal victorian woman meant a passionless woman. The Victorian society polarized the entire race of womanhood into two types: Madonna and Whore. The Madonna or perfect womanhood was characterized by sacrifice, self effacement, moral and physical purity and service, while a whore or fallen woman was characterized by sexual passion and masculine activities. The society demanded purity and chastity only from women, while men were free to keep prostitutes for their sexual satisfaction, and thus a double-standard is legitimized.

Here I think it is quite pertinent to throw some light on the nature of woman as observed by women novelists of the era. In their writings these women novelists were exploring myth about marriage and motherhood and insisting that a woman can have no vocation outside their marriage and motherhood. George Eliot, a major novelist of the period, believed that woman's "ultimate nature" is different from man's. In George Eliot's novels the question of marriage and vocation are linked to the problem of moral choice for men as for women. George Eliot's moralistic idealism clashes with her realism on the question of women's choice. Ideally women should be given the same free moral choice as men, which is what gives drama and interest of the moral process so brilliantly depicted in the portraits of Tito Melema, Fred Vincy. Eliot has to concede that the only choices open to women are negative choices of renunciation and submission. George Eliot insists chiefly that women are different from men. She justifies the value of that difference by attributing it to 'moral power'. Charlotte Bronte, another woman novelist of the era, shows a persistent and in many ways revolutionary interest in the essential nature of women but ultimately insists the idea that a woman's highest vocations lay in the conventional concerns of love and marriage. She glorified and idealized the womanly values of chastity and maternal love. Mrs. Gaskell wished to arouse sympathy for a fallen woman and portrayed her as remotely sensual. Mrs. Gaskell tried to show downfall of woman a misfortune rather than a crime. Many contemporary women writers, both major and minor advocated for a perfect womanhood like sacrifice, self effacement, moral purity and service. They diffused the ideology that women's main concern are those of love, the home and family. In this way the women novelists of the period exerted ideological pressure on society and womanhood.

It was against this background of literary tradition, sexual and social prudery and double standard of the society towards women that Hardy began to write his novels. A literary genius, Hardy believed and wished to wield his pen in defiance of the Victorian ideology and its rules .He gradually came to understand the politics of the publishing world. He could perceive that he had to subject to power rules and conventions if he wished to make a permanent place in the literary market and achieve social respectability. Thomas Hardy

rejected rigid literary convention for representation of women in his novels. He in his novels directly attacks the conventional ideology and institutionalized values of the society that denies woman any independence. Hardy not only acknowledges or gives due recognition to female volatile emotions, female sensations, but he also treats them with the same devotion to physical detail as he gives to male (Morgan: 1988 P.XI). Hardy's representation of womanhood in his novels therefore did not always conform to the traditional image of womanhood and for this he came directly in clash with the conventional critics and readers. He did not conform to the conventional ideology of marriage, and in his major novels projected a gloomy vision of marriage and matrimony and firmly believed like radical feminists that marriage in its current institutionalized form must be abolished to save womanhood from the male dominant sexuality. Nor did his depiction of womanhood conform to the notion of idealized womanhood. In his major novels he represented radical womanhood that rebelled against the oppressive values of the male dominated society. Hardy had to suffer alienation from the literary world and he thought himself a 'misfit' in a conventional society.

Hardy's representation of woman received mixed reactions from the critics. One group of critics accuse Hardy of being anti-feminist. They complained that Hardy showed sexist attitude in representing womanhood that he represented womanhood ambivalently. However, the women characters in his earlier novels show their efforts to come out of their stereotyped roles. In Desperate Remedies, Hardy's first published novel, the heroine Cytherea Graye is shown as a penniless, orphan girl. She seeks employment under an imperious lady Miss Aldclyffe. She manipulates Cythera to marry her illegitimate son Aeneas Manston. Cytherea regards him with mingled feelings. At last she is rescued and it is revealed that Manston is the killer of his first wife. Hardy in this novel attacks the institution of marriage that circumscribes the inner aspirations of women. He shows her as a victim of her own circumstances. Hardy shows Cythera's sexuality and her attempt to find a place in the patriarchal society. In A Pair of Blue Eyes, Elfride is represented with her vibrant, assertive sexuality, transcending her streotyped role of

Victorian womanhood. Her unconventional role borders on the 'unfeminine' and she was to court death for her unconventional role. Hardy in this novel exposes the hypocrisy and the double-standard of Victorian sexual morality. A woman is judged by the conventional society not for her infinite capacity for love but for some of her insignificant womanly indiscretions. Bathsheba, Hardy's heroine in Far From the Madding Crowd is more assertive and independent than Cytherea and Elfride. Hardy shows that the patriarchal society traps her to marriage. She ultimately surrenders to the code of patriarchal society and Hardy was forced to conclude the novel in such a way as to please the conventional critics and readers. Ethelberta, Hardy's heroine in The Hand of Ethelberta is unique among Hardy's heroine in the sense that she is apparently in control of her own destiny. Hardy shows her progress from humble social origin to Lady Mountclere. She plays her 'hand' in the game of social maneuvering. Hardy shows her a successful romancer, a public storyteller, and epic writer. But Hardy show her tragic compromise with old Lord Mountclere for the economic security of her family. In The Return of the Native, Eustacia Vye, the heroine, finds herself suffocated in the narrow world of Egdon Heath. She being financially dependent and having no other opportunity was entrapped in marriage and the society has no space for aspirations of a rebellious womanhood. Hardy shows through Eustacia that when a woman becomes assertive to fulfill her aspirations she is to take death. The patriarchal society terms her a 'fallen' woman. Hardy's vision of the plight of womanhood in the conventional victorian society grew bleaker in each of his successive novels. His representation of womanhood became more radical as he gathered more self confidence and came under the influence of radical feminist thought of the period. In The Mayor of Casterbridge Hardy shows women are turned into a commodity by the patriarchal society. The women are sold in the market like cattle and the society gives no value to her human qualities. Irving Howe declares the male fantasy of Henchard is universal and he shows society's hostility towards women through Micheal Henchard. However, in his last three novels he attacked bitterly the institutionalized codes of marriage and sexuality that subordinate women to the patriarchal society. In these novels he expresses his deep cynicism about conventional marriage and sexual morality. The

heroine of the novel The Woodlanders, Grace Melbury finds herself with an adulterous husband who marries Grace deliberately for material advantages. Fitzpier's immorality allows Hardy to incorporate the theme of divorce and refer to an Act of 1857. He in this novel attacks the double standard of the Divorce Act. The Divorce law was discriminatory and was against women, because they could be divorced for adultery while their husbands could not. In this novel Hardy draws attention to the injustices of the Judiciary by showing his heroine with a womanising husband with no possibility of getting free of him. Tess of the D'urbervilles and Jude the Obscure brought Hardy into the vortex of contemporary controversy. Hardy presents Tess as the victim of society's sexual morality and double standard. Hardy subtitled the novel "A Pure Woman" causing much uproar when the first edition of the novel was published. The critics as well as readers were outraged by Hardy's challenge to conventional morals, religious and social attitudes. Here, Hardy insists that in spite of Tess's sexual violation and pregnancy she remains basically a pure woman .As Rosemarie Morgan says, 'Hardy depicted Tess with her emotional generosity, sexual vitality and moral strength the capacity to rise above her fall and ultimately to redeem the man who bearing the values and sexual prejudices and double -standard of society fails to rise above them in the hour of the need' (Morgan: 1988, 109). The focus on the theme of female emancipation culminating in the concept of the 'New Woman' became sharpest in Jude the Obscure. Hardy shows in Sue Bridehead the climax of struggle of victorian heroine to come out of her traditional role and personality. In this novel Hardy, through the heroine, Sue, attacks the victorian institution of marriage .She does not accept the Victorian codes of marriage, maternity and sexuality, which proved to be patriarchal and oppressive. These radical ideas about marriage and sexuality brought the novelist the charge of immorality. But he remained uncompromising and unmoved in his challenge. The following chapters exploring his novels will try to understand the nature and artistic handling of this challenge.