

Experience speaks or the experienced explores: Understanding the autobiographical elements in the works of Thomas Hardy and RK Narayan

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ABSTRACT

Hardy and Narayan have given us deep psychological study of men and women. They realize that a circle of everyday, humdrum, common people could supply material of infinite human possibilities of thought and action; and, like Chaucer, they did it with joyful and sometimes sorrowful detachment. The vitality of their characters never runs dry. They are not like delicate machines going on for an allotted course of actions. This quality of everlasting freshness is a token of human reality; for human beings even the most ordinary of them, have the immense possibility to provoke thought and inspire creation of a great work of art and this is precisely what Hardy and Narayan have done. This research paper endeavours to trace the autobiographical elements which have been at the background of creativity of these two writers

KEYWORDS:- *Aesthetics, human experience, behaviour, psychology, individuality, personality, rural, irony, tragedy*

INTRODUCTION :- R.K Narayan is a true artist whose primary business as a writer of novel is to create an esthetic longingness in to the hearts of the readers rather than to teach or preach them. He is concerned neither with the exposure of the various drawbacks of society nor with highlighting the cause of the downtrodden and the haves not, nor with the portrayal of spiritualism and inner conflicts; he like true artists is content with only portraying the realistic picture of human behaviour, its various experiences –sweet and sour, rough and sublime.

R.K. Narayan is one of the leading figures in Indo- Anglian fiction and beloved novelist, and for very good reason. The novels are essentially accepted by everyone if it is an entertaining form of literary writing. Otherwise, nobody would read a novel, which has no entertainment value. In addition to providing entertainment, a novel may carry a message for the readers, a political message, or a social message or a message with regard to everyday conduct and behaviour. Thomas Hardy's life experiences are what crafted him as an author. In his early life and childhood he witnessed his parents' unhappy marriage, which was the result of his conception, and became averse to the union of marriage as a result. His inability to attend the University because of lack of funding forced him to become apprenticed to an architect. Hardy's apprenticeship fostered much intellectual discussion about religion, the modern Church, and Darwin;

seeds of doubt in God and frustration with organized religion were sown at this point in his life. Hardy's negative experiences with women helped to finalize his distaste for the Church, and most pointedly, the union of marriage. Hardy and Narayan have given us deep psychological study of men and women. They realize that a circle of everyday, humdrum, common people could supply material of infinite human possibilities of thought and action; and, like Chaucer, they did it with joyful and sometimes sorrowful detachment. The vitality of their characters never runs dry. They are not like delicate machines going on for an allotted course of actions. This quality of everlasting freshness is a token of human reality; for human beings even the most ordinary of them, have the immense possibility to provoke thought and inspire creation of a great work of art and this is precisely what Hardy and Narayan have done.

Characters created by Hardy and Narayan seem traditional and bound by their customs as their creators are children of their respective Ages. Very true, they indeed are as they clearly reflect the social cultural, economic and philosophical outlook of their times. But we can also conclude, quite appropriately that both Hardy and Narayan have a strong streak of individuality. The most striking characteristic about Hardy and Narayan is that despite being conventional, both Hardy and Narayan were modern and had an open outlook, ahead of their ages. Both chose to refrain from the major political, historical,

national and international commotions and changes of their times. Both are masters of irony and yet their view and world are gentle, kind mixed with tragic situations. This is truly ironic given that Hardy only realized that he loved his wife after her death describes his dead wife as a 'dear ghost', whereas during life their relationship had disintegrated beyond repair. The most striking feature of R. K. Narayan's use of irony is his unusual wedding of irony with moral imagination making it moral subtle. Narayan's masterpiece, *The Guide*, shows a fine play of ironic reversals, which turns the book more dramatic than his early works. The irony is used in the book is not rough, harsh or rugged but genial, jovial, midland pure sometimes creating comedy and the other times pathos. His preoccupation with South Indian middle class society, exemplified in the fictional town of Malgudi. He writes humour with a tinge of irony, about Malgudi a fictitious town its inhabitants, their laborious and hard life. Both humour and irony is so inextricably woven together in his novels. Through his novels he artistically concretizes his personal experiences of childhood and adulthood in this little India. Tess of the d'Urbervilles is the greatest of the Wessex novels. It is the greatest work of fiction produced in England in the Nineteenth century. Hardy mentions a simple triangle in the most fascinating way. The end of Tess shocked the Victorian Britishers. Tess meets Alec who seduces her than she meets Angel Clare who woos her and marries her. All the characters of this novel are simply helpless individuals. They are victims of destiny, chance and coincidences. Tess suffers at the hands of malicious destiny and becomes an object of our sympathy and administration. She is a very good-looking girl. Her father has been an ordinary haggler in the valley of Blackmoor, until he comes to know through the local clergy that he belonged to the noble family of d'Urbervilles. The information makes the poor parents of Tess dream of marrying her into a rich aristocratic family. Tess is compelled to work at a dairy farm. Here she meets Alec. He is the son of a blind lady-the owner of a farm. Alec seduces Tess and disgraces the modesty of sleeping Tess which results into her conceiving a child. She returns home shattered physically as well as mentally. Tess undergoes a frustrated gestation period and gives birth to a sickly child who she named as 'Sorrow'. Baptism is refused to her illegitimate son. She begins to work at farm for her livelihood. Ironically her child dies and is refused burial in the churchyard because of illegitimacy. Tess works in the Talbothay's dairy to support her family. Here she meets the youngest son of a clergy man named Angel Clare. He

is an apprentice to be a competent farmer on Tolbathay's dairy. He falls in love with Tess. She is surrounded by the agitation of her sorrowful past but cannot gather courage to reveal to Angel. When Angel proposes her for marriage she seeks advice from her mother who strongly advises her against mentioning her shameful past to Angel and thereby ruining her bright future. Her morality and sense of guilt never let her have her peace of mind as her marriage date approaches near her dilemma too increases. She, unable to confess directly to Angel, writes a confession letter and slips it under the door of Angel hoping it to be read by him before their marriage. But ironically the letter slips under the carpet and Angel cannot read it. After the wedding they move to live on a beautiful farmhouse where Angel had taken on another apprenticeship. Tess is put into repentant mood and she confesses to him, her sin before marriage. Angel Clare is unable to bear the truth. He turns out Tess from his life. Tess returns to her parent's home and works very hard on a farm house to support her family. She goes to meet Angel's parents but they are away at the church as it was Sunday. On her way back she meets her seducer Alec d'Urbervilles who is once again attracted towards her. His frequent visits and the miserable condition of her mother's family compel her to endure and accept Alec's approach. Alec again exploits her. Tess always longs for Angel. Angel too realizes his love and returns to England and looks for Tess. He is extremely shocked and disappointed to see Tess with Alec. He withdraws in a heartbroken state. Tess murders Alec and joins Angel but their union takes place for a very short time. Tess is arrested and is tried in the court of law. She is found guilty of murdering Alec. Tess is hanged and the novel ends in a tragedy. In Hardy's novels nature, society, destiny and fate and irony are the most powerful elements. Destiny prompts Tess to march on the road of doom and destruction. She is quite indifferent to the discovery of aristocratic legacy. She is forced by her mother to claim kinship with the rich relatives. She has no choice other than to accept the ambitious scheme of her mother. Her inherited beauty provokes the evil attention of Alec who takes advantage of her innocence. In this novel the irony of destiny take place in the form of chance. Its victim is poor Tess. Nature helps the merciless fate to bring down complete wrecks of hopes and dreams of the characters. In this, from beginning till end we observe chance dominating the action. It is irony of fate that Angel, Tess's true love comes back a bit too late. Tess surrenders in front of the supreme power that is destiny. Dismayed by the lust of Alec, the

heartlessness of Angel and her family's misery forced her to kill Alec, her seducer. In Hardy's thought, destiny springs from the cosmic irony. This irony has two features; when a person desires one thing and the outcome is opposite and when a person marries, he usually makes a mismatch. The novel is based on the irony of situation; the d'Urberville's residing at The Chase is not the true d'Urbervilles. Tess expects help from the d'Urbervilles of The Chase, but ironically, she gets troubles. The right man Angel comes first, but he does not pay much attention to her at the May dance and the wrong man enters her life, Angel asks forgiveness for his premarital affair, but is unable to forgive Tess for the same reason. Tess goes to Alec as she does not expect Angel to return and forgive her but ironically, he returns to forgive her. R. K. Narayan's novels are like a box of Indian sweets: a highly-coloured container conceals an array of delectable treats, all different in a subtle way, but each one clearly from the same place. There are fourteen novels in the oeuvre enough to create a world. Enthusiasts of his work will read them all and return to them time and again. The busy, or the less committed, may open the box and take out one at random it does not really matter which order one reads them in. But be warned, the consumption of one leads to a strong craving for more. Thomas Hardy and R.K. Narayan have made distinct marks as regional novelists in English literature. Though there are other novelists who have tried hands in this genre, it is Hardy and R.K. Narayan who have perfected this genre. They have created a special place for regional novels by creation of a particular region for their novels. Through their memorable novels they have established themselves as regional novelists of excellence. R. K. Narayan has produced a sizable body of fictional work. He has written more than a dozen novels in addition to the collection of his short stories. His life and work give him the place and prestige as one of the most respected novelists of his times. He has conducted his craft of fiction almost for half a century. It is his childlike imagination, with all its whimsicalities and moods, born of innocence and novelty that endears him to the generations of readers. R. K. Narayan as a fiction writer has a unique flair for inventing astounding stories, with well-knit characters dramatically interplaying on each other with the ultimate purpose of eclectic, the humanistic essences of life and literature. The innocence and innocently revealing manner of his exposition of men and manners is a matter of great interest. Reading R. K. Narayan is a unique experience. He swaps the readers' mind into the world of children as children would like to have

it. The life style of the ladies in the novels of Thomas Hardy is something of an act of welcome. They had full discretion of doing all things in their life of their own accord. R.K. Narayan described the lady characters as a noble one and was under the control of their superiors. The London is a cold country and the people have their food to get more warmth, accustomed to have intoxication liberally and take corn and wheat for their daily life. The dresses are designed with wool and further to maintain the warmth, people used to have frequent get-togethers. India is basically a hot country and the food habits differ as that of London and people dress themselves in a grand manner. The formation of the villages in the English country was matching to population and the traffic there. The mud roads were popular. In Thomas Hardy's Wessex the village atmosphere was much conducive to the inhabitants. There were certain developments in the status of the villages during the period of R.K. Narayan. The site had a facelift, tar roads were existing and motor cars were operated. The railway services also came into use. The authors' dedication was so high that they visualized their thoughts in a crystal-clear manner and presented in their novel stage by stage. This brought a close bond between the reader and the author. Wessex had an important but incalculable effect upon Thomas Hardy's personality, his conception of the novel and his style. The author's use of the regional characteristics of Wessex in the development of the theme, plot, characters and getting is, vital to the success of his novels and is one of the chief attractions. In fact, his range was restricted to rural Wessex and those characters that had a direct connection to the novel. Thomas Hardy's Wessex characters are truly regional because, their livelihood depends on the soil. There is a definite correlation between the traits and experiences of Hardy's characters and their connection to the region. Thomas Hardy pictures his rustics as the regional characters with their superstitions, folk-love, and their dependence on the Thomas earth and their dialect. The major regional characters give a stranger a regional flavor to Thomas Hardy's novels.

R.K. Narayan is such a novelist, whose novels, though they primarily center round a narrowly demarcated place such as Malgudi, rise above the regional framework and become novels of greater significance and broader vision. In this way Narayan's Malgudi had the analogical relationship with Hardy's Wessex. A scrutiny of the vivid range of the life of Malgudi, presents before us the life of the Indians in general and reflects the life of a larger world, the Indian sub-continent. The little words of

Malgudi with its socio-political changes and economics, as well as industrial development stands for the wider world of Indian and the fast-changing nature of characters in all the walks of life, ever since India became independent. Referring to Thomas Hardy, who is an English writer, has done much work to impress the destiny, love, marriage, and superstitious in novels. His ideas spread to the radius of, say fifty miles in and around imaginary Wessex, confirming him a regional novelist. Incidentally Thomas Hardy do not believe in superstitious but supports destiny. Thomas Hardy was brought up by, in a religious environment. He totally deviates from that culture. His parents visit church regularly and Hardy has no belief in church. This is a point for reference to socio-culture since he drastically changed his behavior. Most of his novels are classical sense of tragedy brought in a religious atmosphere. He declares that actions are one for man and the other for woman, which means men are justified in an action and women are not for it. Purity is not in body but in the mind, is an important theme as per Hardy. The development of science and technology had a great leap and in all the novels of R.K. Narayan get a reference on this concept. R.K. Narayan was the chief architect of the imaginary Malgudi and in a phased manner, had illustrated the technical development of the city such as the railway station, banks, churches, posh bungalows, hospital and so on. The role of destiny and irony played in the life of human being is well explained by Thomas Hardy. He feels that it is a major role occupying in almost all the persons. The destiny sometime does good deeds and, in some occasion, it does all things in the reverse way. Thomas Hardy is in the habit of expressing the women characters in a deep sense. Their physical structure is well described, to understand such ladies are always of great demand. The role of a woman is made praise worthy by R.K. Narayan in his novels. However, he is very careful in making any comments over the behaviour and the physical appearance of any woman-folk. R. K. Narayan's Malgudi was very compact one with limited area. The inmates of the village were cordial and had good relations with each other. There were no instances cited such as quarrel or fight. The period in which R.K. Narayan was presenting his novels was under the influence of British colony. This may be the one reason that no internal conflicts were developed. People were totally united for a common struggle. The culture of certain people was in a low profile and they used harsh and rude languages. This has imposed the elite people to part from them and has their own group. This information is available in the Thomas Hardy's

novel. Thomas Hardy loved his novels to be concluded with a tragic end. It may be, most probably he wanted to convey that right act will bring good and vice-versa. R.K. Narayan impresses the audience in all his novels with a start of things to move in a jovial way, making the feeling in the light way. However, he changes the track gradually and takes to a miserable situation and end the story in a tragedy. This may be due to the personal experience of the author. Thomas Hardy in most of his novels explains the characters of women in an elaborate manner. He exposes the ladies of the individuality, thoughts. He gives full freedom in the society, as they long. Sometimes the deal ends in the opportunity of selecting their life partners. R.K. Narayan, due to lack of education in India on those days, the women folk much depend upon their family members all the issues. It is also another fact that, though certain ladies were well educated, still was under the control of the elders. This is considered a good discipline in the family. In a nut shell it is declared that teen age girls were under the strict control of the family members. Thomas Hardy has a greater knowledge on the topography of his land. The life pattern of the inmates are more linked with this concept. Basically, the weather conditions of the universe can be classified as cold and hot. The author praises the cool and cold country, just because Dorset or the Imaginary town Wessex is in the cold location of the England. The familiarities of the cold country is use of liquors, wearing warm clothes. Even the houses are constructed in a different manner to prevent the snow fall. R.K. Narayan also broadly discusses the weather conditions in his novels. Incidentally India falls on the equatorial region. Description of the weather is based on this parameter the hot country. The Malgudians used to meet their friends at the river bank of Sarayu, where a clear evening breeze is welcomed, because of the huge mountains. The rivers and mountains are a point of focus by the authors in their novels. In the days of Thomas Hardy, the development of engineering technology was highly limited. The concept of electricity and its appliances were not projected in any of the novels. In fact, the electricity had come into existence in London during the period 1925. R.K. Narayan is lucky person to enjoy the benefit of the electricity, since it was in existence during his period. The street lights are figured in his novels. There is a mention about the use of the fans and some other electrical appliances in the houses of the South India. Thomas Hardy in his regional novels never had an opportunity to mention the details of the education of the society. His basic interest was to scrutinize the concept of destiny and

ironical situations of life. The following parameters are very clearly narrated by Thomas Hardy the life style of men and women, free movement of the women folk with men and deep affection to religion affairs. Thomas Hardy was born in a family observing the true Christian formalities. In fact, his father was in a leading post in a church. Unfortunately, Thomas Hardy deviated from this concept. He had a strong belief that a life of a person is much more based upon his deeds. This philosophy he had represented in the novels in a great thrust. R.K. Narayan was born in an orthodox family and was brought up under strict discipline, much pertaining to religious obligations. But it is something hard to mention that he had a strange feeling and belief that superstition is a strong tool in the life of a human being. Most of his novels go in the track of joyous mood for a long time but the author will wait for an opportunity to present the superstition as one of the important parameter for any bad and good deeds. This sort of action, the author believed that will bring an idea of the topic mentioned. R.K. Narayan was in the writing field for more than sixty years. He was given award by The Royal Society of London and the government of India made him as a Member of Parliament to Rajya Sabha. Both the novelists had a peaceful and respectful life. They were in good discipline and the society regarded them as the good novelist of their time. Both were bold enough to present the subjects in an aggressive way. The authors had a broad vision and under the banner of a regional novelist, presented the themes, in a grand fitting manner. This was the cause for their popularity in the field of presentation of regional novels. Even today the novels are of great demand. Thomas Hardy had logic of supporting the destiny in human life. This term he inserted in his novels for a good and bad cause. R.K. Narayan handled the subject logic in a grand manner. In fact, all the actions are otherwise, have a greater impact with respect to the application of logic. Thomas Hardy did not have the hopeful, joyous start that many firstborns bring to their expectant parents. He

was conceived out of wedlock; his parents Thomas Hardy and Jemima Hardy were forced to marry six months before his birth. The stress of societal expectations took its toll on Hardy's parents and was aggravated when, upon delivery, the infant Hardy was pronounced dead. According to Gibson, Hardy's newborn body was laid to the side to be disposed of while the nurses tended to his mother; it was not until his faint cries were heard that anyone realized he was alive at all. Hardy's near-death experience in the first minutes of his life and the possible recounting of this story by his mother set the stage for a life of developing fascination with doom, fate, and pessimism. Hardy and Narayan believed that the unique influential power of fiction resides in its appeal to the reader's intuitive conviction. Their approaches are similar, but their methods, and their life values differ. In spite of the fact that his novels do contain bucolic humour, the dominant mood of a Hardy novel is plaintive. This is so because of Hardy's philosophy of life, his personal experiences and reading impressions. Whereas R. K. Narayan is a grand master of irony and humour blended with tragedy. His pretense is a fine healthy humour and therefore his humour is sensible and moderate. He has an intense insight and sensibility to see the funny side of even the most pathetic or tragic situation. Irony as a tool of the tragic/comic novelists often reflects an attitude of detachment since the ironic observer necessarily feels in the presence of an ironic situation a degree of superiority, freedom and amusement. Nonetheless, such condescending laughter may not signify an inability to feel the terrible seriousness of life; it may be a refusal to be overwhelmed by it, an assertion of the spiritual power of man over the predicament of existence. A.R. Thompson argues in his work *The Dry Mock* to this effect in irony, "Emotions clash. It is both emotional and intellectual. To perceive it one must be detached and cool; but to feel it one must be pained for a person or ideal gone amiss".

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