

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 General Background

The term 'gender' has become an issue of serious study today. Especially after the emergence of the theory of feminism, it has occupied an important status in language and literature. The word 'gender' is used in two ways. In grammar, this is the classification of nouns into two or more classes (masculine, feminine and neutral gender) with different grammatical properties. In many of the world's languages nouns are categorized according to their classes and they require different grammatical forms. In sociolinguistics, gender is often used roughly to refer to "a person's biological sex, especially from the point of view of the associated social roles" (Trask 101). In this thesis the gender issue is related to the second definition. The purpose of dealing with gender studies, linking it with Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*, is to carry out the fact that the protagonists Bathsheba to a great extent, and Gabriel Oak, to a little extent, challenge the Victorian notion of gender roles, thinking that they are man made categories, intending to dominate and subordinate females.

Traditionally gender has been taken as the concept that is related to a person's biological sex. But after the advent of sociolinguistics, gender has been used to draw attention to the social, rather than biological construction of sex differences. Our tradition, dominated by patriarchal discourse, has assigned particular jobs and characteristics to males and females. For example, women have been given the jobs like childrearing, cleaning, washing, cooking, etc. which are limited within the four walls of the household. They are said to be shy, physically weak, timid and jealous. Males, on the other hand, have been given the outdoor jobs and they are said to be strong, bold, and courageous. Due to such long-rooted tradition, it has become our

culture; and men and women usually behave in the ways associated with their assigned gender roles because they are socially expected to do so. Sometimes, however, we find men and women doing things which are considered traditionally incongruous with their sexes. Some women do perform heavy and physically challenging tasks. We have also met men who are shy and timid, anxious and self-deprecatory. A timid man believes he is less of a man while a bold woman imagines that she is less feminine than other women.

In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, some characters, principally the protagonists Bathsheba Everdene and Gabriel Oak perform the roles and display characters which are not compatible to what they are traditionally expected to do. There is no confusion in matter of their biological sex but we are in confusion when we see them doing things and behaving. We can not easily confirm what gender they are related to because Bathsheba, in spite of being a female, does masculine jobs and behaves as if she were a male. On the other hand, Gabriel does feminine jobs and behaves as if he were a female. This is the situation leading to a challenge to the notions of traditional gender roles and this is the major issue that is to be dealt with in the thesis. These two characters – a female and a male – display their gender roles sometimes in accordance to their sex and sometimes as if they were differently sexed. The thesis mainly tries to carry out their activities and behaviours that are not in conformity with the notions of traditional gender roles.

The problematics in the study are what gender is, how gender roles are attributed and why the characters in *Far From the Madding Crowd* act and behave in a way that is not congruous with their biological sex as attributed by the tradition. The answers to the problematics are being sought, hypothesizing that the characters act, displaying incongruous behavior with their biological sex to challenge the practices of

Victorian society in matters of gender roles assuming that the gender roles are made to dominate and marginalize females. While discussing the gender roles, mainly two characters– Bathsheba Everdene and Gabriel Oak– are taken into consideration in detail.

1.2. Thomas Hardy, The Victorian World and *Far From the Madding Crowd*

In English literature the period of about 70 years from 1830 to 1900 is known as the Victorian age. The Victorian age was a significant age of scientific progress and rapid inventions which almost transformed the life of man and shook his conventional outlook to its very foundation. The most epoch making change brought about by the scientific progress was the introduction of machinery, which brought into being factories and workshops as well as the capitalist economy. The Industrial Revolution occurred in 1832, which is the point of time when the Victorian era actually commenced. Its effect was profound and far reaching.

Thomas Hardy was born in Higher Bockhampton in 1840. After completing his formal education at the age of sixteen and then apprenticing with his father as a stonemason, he worked, at first, on the restoration of churches. Then he practiced architecture from 1862 to 1867 in London. By the time he reached London, he was determined to be a poet. However, he didn't get contacted with famous writers. He was lonely, although he sometimes saw his friend, Moule. Plagued by poor health in most of his life, Hardy came back to Dorset, where he continued to work in architecture until he started writing poetry with partial achievement. He commenced to publish novels in the 1870s. Hardy wedded Emma Gifford in 1874, and the two embarked on a series of excursions to the continent. They inhabited in several pastoral locations in England, finally building a lasting home called Max Gate in Dorchester. By the 1890s Hardy had achieved huge success with his novels. After that Hardy

again started to write poetry. As his recognition increased, he was awarded a number of honours, including the Order of Merit, the Gold Medal of the Royal Society of Literature, and honorary degrees from the University of Aberdeen and Oxford University. He died of heart disease on January 11, 1928, at Max Gate. After his death it was decided that his heart should be buried near the grave of his first wife, while his cremated remains should be placed in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey. This shows the degree of respect and his popularity Hardy had earned by the end of his long literary career.

Early criticism on Hardy was mixed, especially following the controversy surrounding the publication of both *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. Debate over the morality of Hardy's fiction and the quality of his poetry waned with the New Criticism beginning in the 1940s, when an entire issue of *Southern Review* was devoted to Hardy on the centenary of his birth. Several important books on Hardy ensued, as well as a growing number of journal articles, and by the 1960s Hardy scholarship was a vital part of the academic literary establishment. Most Hardy criticism during this period focused on the best-known novels. In the 1970s, Hardy studies progressed to structuralist and poststructuralist thinking, the latter including feminist, deconstructive, and Marxist interpretations. Traditional non-theory-based criticism, however, continues to co-exist with poststructural approaches, on such topics as Hardy's regionalism, his philosophy and the correlation between his life and his work. Hardy scholars in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have begun to dwell on his poetry. It was the genre neglected for several decades by critics. Criticism of his work continued to proliferate, with several academic journals dedicated solely to Hardy scholarship and many articles and books on Hardy appearing each year.

Hardy is considered one of the greatest novelists of England. His work resembles that of earlier Victorian novelists in technique. But in subject matter Hardy's work boldly violated literary traditions of the age. In contrast to the Victorian ideals of progress, Hardy depicted human existence as a tragedy determined by powers beyond the individual's command. In particular, the external pressures of society and the internal compulsions of characters led him to realistically examine love and sexuality in his fiction. This was his practice that almost offended his readers and endangered his literary reputation.

Hardy established his reputation with the publication of *Far From the Madding Crowd* in 1874. It was his first critical and financial success. It was the first of so-called Wessex novels, set in a fictitious English country resembling Hardy's native Dorsetshire. The novel's title was borrowed from Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in the Country Churchyard*, initially appeared in magazine serial form and was the first Hardy work to be widely reviewed. Variations of its rustic characters and settings were to be repeated in several novels. The novel's protagonist Bathsheba Everdene would also presage other strong Hardy heroines.

Bathsheba Everdene, who inherited a large farm from her uncle, becomes the centre of attention for three men. After a chance meeting with a gentle sheep farmer, Gabriel Oak, Oak proposes marriage to Bathsheba, but is refused as she does not consider him a proper suitor. Oak loses most of his herd and becomes a faithful servant for Bathsheba. She then meets a neighbouring well-to-do farmer, Mr. Boldwood, who impresses Bathsheba. She later capriciously sends him a valentine, which excites Boldwood, and he proposes marriage. Bathsheba puts him off, but it is assumed that she will surrender. In the subplot, a marriage between Bathsheba's servant, Fanny Robin, and the dashing Sergeant Troy is stopped because of

misunderstanding. Troy waits Fanny Robin to marry her in a church with his men but Fanny loses her way. Then Troy deserts her in a pitiable condition. Then Troy turns his attention to Bathsheba and impresses her with his dazzling sword practice. Troy gains her hand in marriage, leaving Boldwood heartbroken. Meanwhile, the helpless Fanny dies in the workhouse, and her body is brought back to Bathsheba's farm. Bathsheba discovers the corpse of a baby, Troy's child, beside that of Fanny. Troy disappears, and when his clothes are discovered on a beach, it is presumed that he has drowned. Boldwood reappears in the scene, and Bathsheba agrees to marry him out of a sense of remorse. Troy, however, unexpectedly returns and is killed by the distraught Boldwood, who is later tried and found insane. Bathsheba is at last ready to see the true worth of Oak, who has faithfully waited for a long time.

Bathsheba's final acceptance of Oak is a form of redemption for her earlier willful behaviour. The development of Bathsheba's character reinforces the ideas that vanity is futile and that rebellion will ultimately be put down for the good of the community. While Bathsheba ultimately is portrayed as a reformed character, the reader may find that her old feisty self was truly more interesting.

In the Victorian age, men as the head of the family were responsible for all social contacts. The men as the aggressive part were expected to be strong, rational, and always ready to fight, to defend and to be sexually active. Women, on the other hand, were dependent and subdued to a male protector. They were only in charge of innerfamilial relationships, weak, emotional, irrational, compensating male aggressions, sexually passive or disinterested.

This novel presents us twisted assumptions about gender roles. Bathsheba, the heroine of the novel is not likely to possess the thoroughly Victorian female traits whereas the hero of the novel, Gabriel Oak does not possess wholly male

characteristics of the Victorian male figure. Especially the enigmatic characteristics that lie in these two figures concern their social behaviours associated with gender complexity. However, this mystery of gender roles remains unsolved even at the end of the novel.

1.3. Riddle in Hardy's Society

From the perspective of gender issue, it is attempted to clarify how the contemporary outlook of society towards males and females was like. The entirety of this thesis is to read, scrutinize and reveal the expected relation between gender and sex, and to point out the discordances between the two. The activities of the main characters like Bathsheba and Oak in the novel, to some extent go beyond the general conventions and expectations of Victorian age. Victorian world would expect strong, independent and logical male figure. Moreover, he would be assertive, forceful and competitive. On the other hand, the Victorian female figure was supposed to be passive, docile, subservient and cheerful. She would be expected as dependent, weak, emotional and soft. Bathsheba is assertive, self-confident and forceful whereas the male character, Oak, is submissive, docile and compliant in many instances. These types of behaviours of the protagonists create a riddle in Hardy's society and leave us in a conundrum of gender smearing. There is a blur in gender roles in these two characters, which is dealt with in detail in the textual analysis.

The novel has not yet been fruitfully explicated in terms of gender and its blurring. It has been acclaimed as a novel that exemplifies the working of fate in human life leading to unwanted tragedy. The aesthetically superb novel thus now requires to be analyzed and criticized from a standpoint of gender. Largely because of his multi-faceted approach to gender politics, the postmodern emphasis of the 1990s was congenial to Hardy studies. The postmodern questioning of a binary gender

system and its accompanying gender roles found an appropriate subject in Hardy. His creation of powerful women, sensitive men, and convoluted sexual ties has challenged conventional notions of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality. Quite contrary to the contemporary general conventions, Hardy's inventions of such type of characters have become really matters of criticism in the modern and postmodern age. Why Hardy created such type of characters was once an impenetrable riddle. But now, due to the introduction of the ground-breaking idea of gender and sexuality, and masculinity and femininity, the topic has become quite pertinent and a burning issue for discussion.

The critics assert the profound effect of feminist literary criticism on Hardy studies from the evolution of this kind of criticism in the late 1970s and early 1980s through its proliferation in the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. Hardy's agitated relation to the gender roles and stereotypes of his time makes his work a rich source of speculation for feminist critics.

As the different works of the feminists suggest, critical commentaries on Hardy in the 1970s and 80s tended to be preoccupied with his gallery of strong women characters—Bathsheba, Eustacia, Arabella, Sue—and with “placing” him politically: was his work feminist? Sexist? Anti-sexist but not quite feminist? This critical perplexity proved to be (not surprisingly) incapable of resolution, apart from a general agreement that his work could be classified, at various times, as all three—appropriately enough, since Hardy's oeuvre encompasses a more complex contemplation of gender issues than such labels can adequately account for.

1.4. Review of Literature

Hardy is often called a regional novelist. In most of his novels the scenes and characters are taken from the Wessex countryside. He is a transitional author between

the nineteenth and twentieth century. He locates his characters in a well described geographical and historical, largely rural, setting from which their loves and tragedies can be made more poignant. The central appeal of Hardy's works is his description of place and the setting of characters' outwardly observed emotions. The place is Wessex, one that is transitional between the agrarian age which frames people and their stories, and the industrial change all around. This Wessex is real but has been given additional imaginary force. Hardy's Wessex is a more intense Wessex. Hardy has revived the place in his novels:

It was in 1874, on the publication of his fourth major novel *Far From the Madding Crowd* that Hardy revived the regional term 'Wessex', which had been largely unused since Saxton times. Over the next 30 years he wrote a series of 15 novels as well as many short stories which were set in various parts of the six counties of southern England, centered on Dorset. (Birch 348)

Hardy does not show such events as falling in love at its best or committing a crime. He does not show best moral and spiritual problems either. Rather, he shows these activities in local context. His method is to shift perspectives, tackle the problems obliquely, use odd angles and give multiple views. It is from this the psychology of the characters is drawn out, as an observer. The authorial voice is strong because the speaker presents himself very logically and accurately. His narrative is straightforward and sequential. The events in the narrative don't have a zigzag or to- and- fro movement. Hardy's characters are real, life-like figures. They are bestowed with common human weaknesses so that we can believe them easily. Moreover, these characters can be assimilated with the ordinary people of our surroundings. Hardy views that natural force is weak in front of the coincidences.

Chances play main roles in most of his plays. His pessimism about nature and its competitive force, and the way he uses symmetry and ironic co-incidences suggest him as a nineteenth century novelist.

However, Hardy points ahead to the twentieth century with his use of symbolism. And his repeated images to show emotions remind us of post World War novels. Critics associate him with pessimism, gloom, fate and tragedy. He is liberal but an evolutionary pessimist and an atheistic view that sees us as becoming doomed. Life is cruel and characters get trapped. It creates some bitterness. Yet there is a positive affirming attitude. Forces seem to be at work where people just fall in love and then have to deal with the complicated tangle which results. The passionate love described is that of which characters are not themselves fully conscious. They are ordinary human beings subject to ordinary joys and sorrows and common human passions.

Hardy has taken pastoral settings not only to show the peaceful environment of the countryside. The more intense thing he wants to presents is though countryside seems more peaceful than the city; it is not away from the modern problems. In this regard Vance comments:

Hardy follows George Eliot in helping the novel to come out of age as a serious mode of social and moral exploration, simultaneously showing country life as a site of modern problems of insecurity, love and money and embodying a critique of more idealized and artificial forms of literary representation. (xvi)

The remark highlights Hardy's nature. He shows the countryside which seems to be quiet and peaceful but there is so much tumult and confusion and really is not far away from the strife and struggle of the city life. Hardy in a single work has tried

to present so many ideas. He has incorporated the humorous as well as the catastrophic, the old as well as the modern, the pastoral as well as the urban:

It presents a greater variety of moods than any of the others. The range and room of English country life for purposes of fiction he first proved in this story, which is at once comedy, tragedy, idyll, rustic chronicle, and shepherd's calendar. Into no other book has he put such close and lavish work; none is more vivacious, more characteristic; it contains the essence of his genius. (qtd. in Gibson 364)

Virginia Woolf discusses the important part played by the novel and sees *Far From the Madding Crowd* as the triumphant outcome of Hardy's earlier works as she remarks, "Hardy's genius is uncertain in development, uneven in accomplishment, but when the moment came, magnificent in achievement. The moment came, completely and fully, in *Far From the Madding Crowd* [...] The subject was right; the method was right and it must hold its place among the great English novels." (qtd. in Gibson 365)

Hardy's love of nature is nothing mystic or transcendental as that of Romantic writers but realistic. He loves nature for her beauty, and not for any mystic qualities that she might have. He does not ignore her faults. He knows that the serpent also hisses where the sweet birds sing. Gibson quotes Virginia Woolf's words as, "None loved better or heard with greater understanding than Hardy" (365). Hardy gives us both types of picture—ugly as well as beautiful, the bright as well the dark.

When Hardy's story appeared anonymously in the *Cornhill Magazine*, many good judges rated it as the work of George Eliot's. In this regard, Hutton remarks:

If *Far From the Madding Crowd* is not written by George Eliot, then there is the new light among the novelists. In every page of these

introductory chapters there are a dozen sentences which have the ring of the wit and the wisdom of the only truly great English novelist now living... (qtd. in Gibson 361)

Critics say that Hardy has followed the footsteps of George Eliot to a great degree. The creation of rural setting of both the novels Eliot's *Adam Bede* and Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* is the most obviously similar:

Like his predecessor George Eliot, whose early novels (*Adam Bede*(1859), *The Mill on the Floss*(1860) and *Silas Marner* (1861)) appealed to a sense of common humanity by evoking conventional pastoral images and tropes, Hardy turned to pastoralism as a literary landscape for his humanist ideals.(Gerard 332)

Henry James views that Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* is not only similar to Eliot's work in pastoralism but also in matters of characterization. To some extent, Bathsheba in *Far From the Madding Crowd* and Hetty in *The Adam Bede* can be compared on the basis of the remarks made by James:

Both Hetty and Bathsheba are represented as pretty and vain. But their prettiness and vanity are of two very different kinds. And in her description of the charms of Hetty's prettiness, George Eliot shows herself far more of a poet than Mr. Hardy. Mr. Hardy tells us that Bathsheba was beautiful, and gives us an idea of what her beauty was, but he does not paint it with the same feeling with which George Eliot Paints Hetty's face. (qtd. in Gibson 363)

The reviewers have commented on the influence of George Eliot's style on Hardy, on one hand, and found that most of their handling of nature is in a different tone, on the other:

George Eliot and Hardy were relatively close in their readings of the scheme of natural law, but temperamentally they were very different. Both might have seen nature as a regular system of operating with indifference to human values and aspirations, but the feeling-tone of George Eliot's natural description is Wordsworthian rather than Naturalistic. (Jones 406)

Professor Richard C. Carpenter has lauded the novel for its imagistic design. He opined that one of the reasons that makes this novel as a major work Hardy's good management to create a fabric of images to deepen the emotional and conceptual significance upon the readers. The value of Hardy images in this work can be realized as Carpenter comments:

Far From Madding Crowd would be merely a kind of melodramatic folk tale about the fair charmer who overplayed her capriciousness and came to insight and repentance almost too late. With this imagery, the novel becomes, formally, a tight woven texture of symbolic and structural meaning. Without the affective communication of such images the novel would be an insequential tale of foolish people rather than the powerful probing into the human significance of vanity, desire, and despair which it assuredly is. (345)

Commenting on Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* Henry James hails it as the true reflector of the countryside in the vicinity of the nature. More importantly pastoral scenes are highlighted. He says:

Mr Hardy describes nature with a great deal of felicity, and is evidently very much at home among rural phenomena. The most genuine thing

in his book, to our sense, is a certain aroma of the meadows and lanes—a natural relish for harvesting and sheep washing. (qtd. in Gibson 362)

James also comments on the characters of Bathsheba and calls her a selfish flirting lady. This idea is reflected when he states, “ She plays fast and loose with poor Gabriel Oak in the most heartless manner, she sends Boldwood a valentine with the words ‘Marry Me’ on the seal” (qtd. in Gibson 363).

In an identical mode Professor David Daiches finds Hardy’s descriptions of nature picturesque, fresh and accurate as he remarks:

Far From the Madding Crowd uses a wider canvas and takes a closer look at the nature and consequences of human emotions. There is still an idyllic element present, but misfortune, coincidence, and the intrusion into the pastoral scene of an element of sophisticated selfishness from the outside world combine to make this love story much more tangled and more violent in its light and shade. (1075)

The early scenes sketch Bathsheba as a selfish character. Her selfishness is heightened with her wayward and inconstant manner. When she is entrapped by the cunning lady-killer Sergeant Troy we feel no pity for her. However, at the end of the novel, Bathsheba experiences an absolute hunger for pity and sympathy. It is a token of our own compassion for her that we welcome with relief and satisfaction the end of her agonies. In this regard Duffin comments:

Bathsheba has been through the fire, and now at length begins to show the metal she is made of. The woman who restores Fanny’s grave is a noble development from the girl who preened herself in the mirror and sent farmer Boldwood the valentine. (13)

Like Hardy's other novels, *Far From the Madding Crowd* has received critical acclaim for over a century. Besides the traditional non theory based criticism such as his regionalism, autobiographical aspects and his philosophy about human destiny shaped by fate, this novel has lent itself varied critical approaches from the nineteenth century onwards. The related literatures show that some scholars have lauded the novel for its sheer depth of pathos in depicting a doomed man's story, while others prefer to read the socio-economic implications of the novel rather than the merely aesthetic elements. Victorian tradition placed excessive emphasis on the chastity of women. Any contact with the outside world was supposed to corrupt and spoil them. Their sole business was to look after the comforts of their men folk. But with the passing of time, the movement for woman's emancipation gained ground; women were given political rights and came out of their houses to take up independent careers. Problems of sex and married life received increasing attention from thinkers and writers.

Hardy's treatment of his characters beyond the general conventions of the Victorian age was quite innovative and a hot matter of study. Therefore, of the many possible critical responses to the novel, a study of gender roles, dismantling and reconstructing the traditional ones can be a striking issue for the research.

CHAPTER TWO

Gender: Concept, Origin and Development

2.1. Gender and Sex

The relation between gender and sex is burdened with perplexity and even a degree of complexity. One line of argument goes that sexual characteristics are fixed as per the law of nature, and they account for gender role arrangements. That is, since men and women are differently endowed by nature, their duties and capacities also differ. But others, especially the ones armed with the latest theories of nature/nurture controversy, deny such simplistic differentiation between the two. Gender is not the same as sex. Sex is a biological fact but gender is a social construct. Gender is composed of a set of socially defined character traits. Das differentiates the gender from sex as he says, "Gender is a social and cultural construct, while sex is biological and natural. Sex is associated with biological reproduction, whereas gender is a notion of masculinity and femininity" (149).

Biologically and socially, there are both similarities as well as differences between the male and the female. The two sexes, in fact, are more similar than different. However, differences are often much more highlighted. Gender is not merely a system of classification by which the male and female are biologically sorted, separated and socialized. It is also an axis along which power, hierarchy and inequality, among others, are distributed, explained and rationalized. Sex and gender, therefore, are essential components of gender politics though they differ from each other.

The word "Gender" refers to the socio-cultural definition of manliness and womanliness, the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles. "Gender is used to refer to those characteristics of socio-cultural origin which

are attributed to the different biological sexes” (Hawthorn 139). It is wrongly used as an analytical tool to understand social realities with regard to women and men. For example, our society has a belief that the role of care giving to children is of women and role of going out for work to maintain the family financially is of man, and this is not a biologically based fact, but constructed by the males in a patriarchal society for their own convenience. In this regard Tyson’s remark is appropriate:

No one is trying to say that women are not good caregivers to children, a more accurate statement is that many women and men are good caregivers to children and enjoy that role a great deal; at the same time, however, many women and men wouldn’t choose that role as their primary function in the household if they had a choice. In short, nurturing is not a role biologically linked to sex although; many people long have believed it to be. (110)

Gender, now is universally accepted as the concept for distinguishing people on the basis of socio-cultural behaviour for describing masculinity and femininity. It means femininity and masculinity, or let’s say gender, is culturally constructed notion regarding the behaviours displayed by people. In this connection, Tyson strongly maintains that gender is a man-made system and it is:

Gender is a socially constructed rather than a matter of biology; women and men usually behave in ways associated with their assigned gender because they are socially programmed to do so, not because it is natural for them to do so. (110)

The notion of gender differs from place to place and culture to culture. There is no concrete view about how many gender categories really exist in our society.

The American gender system is referred to as binary system because it consists of two genders, masculine and feminine, that are based on two sexes, male and female, and because those two genders are considered polar opposites. (Tyson 110)

On the other hand, “South East Asian culture in which men and women are considered more alike than different-so much so that they are not considered different genders ” (Tyson 110). The concept of gender is different in Native American culture as pointed out by Tyson. She says, “Native American cultures in which there are more than two genders” (110).

Within the context of the male-female differences and similarities, the notion of sex comprises the biological properties of a person whereas the notion of gender comprises the social properties of a person as expressed in the following text:

The relations between men and women are socially constituted and not derived from biology. Therefore the term gender relations should distinguish such social relations between men and women from those characteristics, which can be derived from biological differences. In this connection sex is the province of biology, i.e. fixed and unchangeable qualities, while gender is the province of social science i.e. qualities which are through the history of social relations and institutions. (Ostergaard 6)

Biological properties, among others, include structure, hormones and chromosomes. Images, roles and responsibilities are social properties. As soon as a baby is born, he or she is differentiated by his or her external genitalia. This is sexual identification. In addition, different sets of images, roles, responsibilities, expectations etc. are created for boys on the one hand and girls on the other. This is gender

identification. The construction of a gender is highly influenced by economic, political and cultural aspects of a given society:

The concept of gender is typically placed in opposition to the concept of sex. While our sex (male/female) is a matter of biology, our gender (feminine/masculine) is a matter of culture. Gender may therefore be taken to refer to learned patterns of behaviour and action, opposed to that which is biologically determined. Crucially, biology need not be assumed to determine gender. (Das 151)

It is quite difficult to establish what natural and social construction of gender is. It is because as soon as a child is born, families and society begin the process of gendering. In almost all parts of the world, from the very beginning, boys are encouraged to be tough and outgoing; girls are encouraged to become demure and homebound. There is nothing in a girl's body, which stops her from wearing short dresses, or climbing trees or riding bicycles. Similarly, boys do not possess any especial natural character, which stops them playing dolls, or going to kitchen, or looking after the young babies. Hence all these differences are not natural but artificially imposed differences and they are created by society. These differences are known as gender differences. Such type of social creation is present in our society too. For example, if a man often gets busy with washing, child caring or kitchen work, he is called womanish since our society has traditionally assigned those jobs to women. Similarly, a woman who is bold, outspoken, outgoing and does some social work is called a man-like woman. Thus on the basis of outer situation- work, speech, dress, behaviour we assign the quality of masculinity or femininity regardless of their sex.

2.2 Gender Studies

When we study about gender, we find that the discrimination between male and female is socially constructed and is based on social rules and norms. But one may question what rules are. Simply put, social norms or rules are ways of doing things or patterns that become routine over a period of time. The patterns are so socially legitimated that they become recurrent, because of the intricate ways in which identity and roles are knotted. When we talk about male and female, it is about sex but when we talk about maleness and femaleness it is about gender. Since gender is a concept constructed by the people in the society, we may happen to see maleness in females and femaleness in males. Gender studies investigate how women and men live out their feminine and masculine roles in different cultural settings.

Merriam Webster, in *Encyclopedia of Literature* defines Gender Studies as “A field of criticism that studies the influence, conscious or unconscious, of gender upon works of art” (454). It is often admitted that gender has been constructed through social and political processes that play out innumerable performances and practices of masculinity and femininity, which in turn are embedded in and enforced by social and political institutions. These manly and womanly practices and associations need not be tied to human bodies. Therefore, male-female dichotomy is fixed since it is the matter of sex and it is natural and universal whereas masculinity and femininity are not fixed since they are socially created matter of gender. In this connection, Siann's remark is worth mentioning, “Gender and the labels associated with it, primarily those two descriptors, ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ are neither fixed nor immutable depending as they do on cultural constructions” (3).

The history of gender studies is not very old. During the early 60s, some women scholars showed the concern of women's space in various disciplines, which they found missing. They began with the question about their status and their roles in

the society which opened the eyes of many women scholars to explore the contribution of women in various fields. According to Webster gender studies emerged in the mid-1980s as a development of feminist criticism (454). Feminists found that the contribution of women in history, literature, arts, science, social sciences, etc. were ignored which was the point to search for the position of women in history, academics and in society at large:

In the late 1960s, closets opened, and gay and lesbian scholars who had up till then remained silent regarding their sexuality or the presence of homosexual themes in literature began to speak. Then work, along with feminism, helped bring into being a new school of gender theory in the 1980s. Gender critics, inspired especially by the Foucault's work on the history of sexuality, began to study gender and sexuality as discursive and historical institutions. (Ryan 115)

The history of gender studies does not have the exact date of its origin. But according to Webster it is Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* which is taken as the first document referring to differences between sex and gender. In his own words, "The principal influence of gender studies was the publication in 1976 of the first volume of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, which delineates the differences between sex and gender" (454).

Mark Hawkins-Dady, in his book *Literature in English* writes: "Although the discussion of gender seems to be a relatively new aspect of literary criticism emerging in the 1980s, it has a much longer history, notably in feminist criticism" (320). And the expression of Jeremy Hawthorn, in his work *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* assimilates feminism with gender studies, "Feminism is a political position,

femaleness a matter of biology, and femininity a set of culturally defined characteristics” (115).

Gender Studies and feminist thoughts have sprouted side by side and they are intricately connected. “The concept of gender enables feminist critics to expose the critical sleight of hand that systematically marginalizes women’s writing, women’s representations of women in literary criticism” (Hawkins 320). In a similar fashion Hawthorn puts his view forward about the gender studies that has been oriented to emphasize the social shaping of femininity and masculinity and to challenge the idea that the shaping is natural. He says, “The term ‘gender’ was adopted by feminists to emphasize the social shaping of femininity and masculinity, to challenge the idea that relations between women and men were ordained by nature” (140). Early women movement and feminist thought paid little attention on socially constructed differences between male and female. After the 1970s, it took an impetus as a social issue. Several theories and empirical studies have been propounded on gender relations, equity and inequality after the 1970s:

Gender critics have broadened the definitions. Male critics who wish to pursue feminist studies often do so under the umbrella term of gender studies, and in gay studies critics often approach their subject through the topic of gender. Both of these groups are less interested in a writer’s or reader’s biological sex than in certain qualities of masculinity and femininity. (Guerin et al. 200)

Gender is not a biological concept but this ideology is highly influenced by feminist paradigm. Gender issues affect all of us, throughout our lives. It is an understanding of the ways in which men’s work and women’s is fundamental to an ability to function effectively and knowledgeably in modern society. Further, gender

studies graduates are equipped with significant insights and knowledge important to many occupations. They have, for example, a valuable capacity to understand the ways in which individuals, organizations and governments operate in a variety of contexts.

2.3. Gender Ideology

We are conventionally supposed to do respective work as fixed by our socially constructed gender roles. There has always been an intricate but invisible bond between man and woman. It is not the bond of humanity but that of power. The discrimination between man and woman is based on the gender ideology which is just a social construction of differences. These artificially made social norms and rules do not have natural links but the patterns are so socially legitimized that they determine identity and roles of man and woman. That men are breadwinners and women are homemakers or that men are leaders and decision makers and women are followers and implementers of the decisions is the gender ideology prevalent in our society. In this regard Geetha paints the picture of males as:

Men are confident, act as if it is given to them to do so, as if the entire world is theirs for the taking. While economic power, educational advantage and the familial and social roles they play inspire this easy confidence, this latter, is always an embodied quality. (127)

Most often women are commoditized in relationship with men. They are treated merely as a means of sadistic pleasure. From the early part of their lives they are instructed to internalize the patriarchal ideology which is based on male supremacy. They are induced with the belief that the success of their existence depends on satisfying the masculine needs. The structural difference between men and women was created from the very beginning of the human civilization which created rules

and behaviours appropriate to the sexes and later expressed them in customs and social values:

Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing and submissive. These gender roles have been used very successfully to justify inequalities, which still occur today. (Tyson 85)

The society is responsible for assigning gender roles to men and women. The reversal of gender roles and ideology must indeed be possible since it is just constructed and artificial. “Women are not born feminine, and men are not born masculine, rather these gender categories are constructed by society, which is why this view of gender is an example of what has come to be called social constructionism” (Tyson 86).

Females have more difficulties if they are given chances in the external world combining the roles of worker and mother. It becomes usually the woman who does most of the household works and childcare. Though the females now have advantages of so many options they are equally harassed by the role overload as they have to present themselves in varied roles in varied identities. Men are less likely to experience discrimination because of gender. But females have to bear it in almost every step. Females are even the victim of sexual harassment in their workplaces by their co-workers and boss also. We can not define the sexual harassment easily. Kristine Brown and Susan Hood in their *Academic Encounters: Life in Society* say, “We define sexual harassment as unwanted sexual advances” (91). These unwanted sexual advances over the females by the males have added more obstacles for the equality of the two genders.

Most feminist approaches share a belief that gender matters in understanding war of the sexes. They also share a concern with changing 'masculinism' in both scholarship and political–military practice, where masculinism is defined as an ideology justifying male domination. They see women as a disadvantaged class, unjustly dominated and exploited by men.

The term 'feminism' is relatively modern one that emerged long after women started questioning their artificially made inferior status and demanding their inclusion in their social position. Even after the time the word 'feminism' was coined, it was still not adopted as a term of identification by many of those who campaigned for women's rights. It is a doctrine advocating social and political rights for women, equal to those of men. It is also the body of knowledge, thought and theory that feminist scholars have created to challenge patriarchal knowledge and ideology.

Today feminism has freed women from fatalism by showing them that while their sex, i.e., female is natural, and their gender i.e. woman is a social construct: it is a society which makes masculine and feminine, which assigns different roles, rights and responsibilities to men and women.

Feminism is not just about women becoming like men, it is about finding out what is good in both male and female ways of being and doing, and creating an alternative culture. Feminism is to conceptualize the world from the perspective of women and to be collective for social change. It is a way of thinking critically about patriarchal values and awareness of the patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women. Even the modern society that advocates females' rights is discriminating against females. An example of this is that there is a provision of reservation for females. The inherent meaning of this is that females are weak and cannot compete with males. The females themselves are

guilty of such discrimination as they readily accept the provision of reservation. Once they claim they are equal to males, why do they not have courage to say that they do not need reservation but that they can compete with males? It shows that the gender discrimination is almost impossible to obliterate. It remains this way or that.

The signs of a transition in the gender order are everywhere and the impact on men and masculinities is very dramatic. In many respects these changes are interpreted through two perspectives: men as victims and men as under-achievers. The most dramatic shifts in the gender order concerns women. Young professional women are winning many of the new jobs in the services and knowledge industries, earning more money, increasing their share of income and strengthening their hold on the professions. In the field of education, female achievement has been outstripping that of young males for at least a decade. With an increasing number of young women exhibiting characteristics previously considered typically male, such as a willingness to take risks, a desire for adventure in sport, foreign travel and a much greater interest in sexuality, the age-old conception of the role of the male 'breadwinner' is decaying.

CHAPTER THREE

Gabriel, Bathsheba and Gender in Victorian Period

Many of Hardy's novels have generated critical receptions about gender and sex. The Victorian society had undermined the issues of gender and sex. The term "gender" was still vague and the people were in the confusion what gender actually meant, and whether it referred to sex (biology) or not. In course of time, gender has been proved just as the costume wrapped by the society over the biological sex. The concept of gender has become gradually clearer especially after 1980s and after the advent of gender studies. Then, Hardy's novels have started to be interpreted in different dimensions connecting these issues like gender and sex. Hardy, in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, dramatically presents a number of concerns about gender and the roles of male and female in the society. For the purpose, he employs reconstruction of gender roles as his technique. He has created complex characters like Bathsheba and Gabriel to challenge the stereotyped traditional gender roles. The theme of reconstruction of gender roles is pervasive throughout the novel which can be observed from various angles—setting, characters, actions, dialogue, characters' attitude etc. This chapter probes into how Hardy uses gender to reflect the tumultuous late Victorian society which had fixed gender roles that had fashioned male supremacy over the female. The rejections of stereotyped gender roles have been conspicuously noticeable more than ever through the characteristics and activities of the protagonists Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene.

When Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* appeared anonymously in the *Cornhill Magazine*, the novel got enormous amount of critical attention about the authorship. Many scholars thought the serial must have been written by a woman. George Eliot, at that time, was recognized as the novelist of patriarchal pastoral.

Feminist critics read this novel, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, in the same vein. They only saw the controlling of the male by the female from the start to the end of the novel. But it is a grievous error to assess the work in this way. In spite of the prevalent gender ideologies and the roles of the Victorian society, where women are always innocent and passive victims of patriarchal power, the novel destabilizes the stereotypical gender roles.

Since Hardy belongs to the transitional phase of Victorian and modern age, he does not believe in the dialectical theory of gender and power where one sex always oppresses the other. Shires comments on Hardy as, "He has taken immense pains to write a non- patriarchal pastoral, so seduced is he by his own love for the unaggressive feminine, which he does not limit to one sex"(163). Hardy's treatment of both male and female sexuality is equal and balanced. He distinguishes biology from gender. While a man can do nothing to change his biology or sex and must submit passively to it, he can do much to change the society and its outward fabric of gender roles through wise social reforms. Hardy treats life as suffering to reach enlightenment, and views that the suffering should not be heightened with social injustices and discrimination of male and female. The view is reflected in the lives of Gabriel and Bathsheba. They suffered a lot for a long time but finally they got married so as to end the suffering.

The text, especially by the feminists, has been assessed as a predominantly male discourse intent on taming the heroine where Gabriel Oak is viewed as a patriarch who would control Bathsheba from the start to the end. Leslie Stephen (1832-1904), a distinguished critic and biographer, though now best remembered as the father of Virginia Woolf, gave editorial advice and correction to Hardy's work, *Far From the Madding Crowd*. He made Hardy cut out some of the lively descriptive passages:

Hardy stood firm on that point, and got him to tone down direct references of sexuality which might alienate the respectable (and largely female) middle class readership on which the *Cornhill* depended. For this he has been condemned as a prude, blaming the reading-public for his own squeamishness. (Vance VI)

The extract indicates a fear of the editor of forfeiting female readers since the novel confirms male dominated female world. Many interpreters present Bathsheba, finally, as a passive character entangled in a sexual ideology. Bathsheba has been interpreted as the victim of Victorian patriarchal society as she is trapped by her suitors. This interpretation moreover assesses Bathsheba, first obsessively gazed by Gabriel Oak, and the second, humiliated by Troy and then broken by the perusal of Boldwood and finally married to Oak as a passive and helpless woman.

However, such an analysis of gender ideology, in which women are always sketched as passive and innocent, is not to the point of satisfaction. Bathsheba, first, initiates the idea of marriage with Gabriel Oak. Their marriage, the roles and their identities are intermingled and exchangeable. Hardy's treatment of marriage and love is not like that of predator and prey, parasite and host or master and servant rather both the male and female are treated equally who come together to promote the fulfillment of their humanity. The marriage between Gabriel and Bathsheba does not only refer their indulging in stereotypical gender roles of male and female ideologies but something complicated. Hardy lets us interpret his novel's ending freely not because Bathsheba would go into patriarchal prison house and limit herself in the domestic spheres. Though the closure of the novel fixes male power and female dependency, the art of character sketch of Hardy to his protagonists denies power and sexuality to either sex. Bathsheba does not have the position of a dependent woman

neither is Oak solely dominant. Bathsheba has been presented as powerful as a male and, Oak as submissive as a female. Hardy's end of the novel represents the view that power does not work for one ideological end rather it shifts from one gender to another.

More than this, Hardy's ending of the novel suggests that nature and biology are fixed and unchangeable whereas nurture, gender and power are not. His description of Bathsheba as a strong and yet womanly, a farmer and wife, but not a mother, has left us with innumerable interpretations. The last event of the novel says that neither the female should be made less powerful limiting her in household affairs nor they should get more independence or completely liberated from the household affairs. Hence, the novel, breaking patriarchy and its domination and the discrimination between male and female as well as the stereotypical ideologies constituted by the society, gives a space for equality to both the genders. Moreover, the text has splintered the monolith of patriarchal values and provided room for female power and so continuously destabilizes the gender ideologies of the society.

According to the Victorian standards, the appropriate husband would be the man who could protect the woman from her weaknesses and infirmities by giving her security and the wisdom of his maturity. But in terms of this novel, Oak, who is eminently incapable of protecting her sexuality or her choices at first, becomes the husband to Bathsheba at the end. Money and position become insignificant in front of the qualities that Oak has promoted gradually through his experiences. Oak's stoicism is the point of departure from the Victorian standards which shows marriage is more enduring and timeless in its roots. Though he becomes unable to protect Bathsheba from the dreadful marriage with Troy, eventually, Oak through his endurance and experience, becomes like a guardian to Bathsheba who matches her variety and scope.

3.1. Bathsheba's Masculine Traits

Various patterns of behaviour of Bathsheba in *Far From the Madding Crowd* transcend rigidly conceptualized sexual boundaries. The motif of gender identities and roles become recurring issues in this novel, especially in connection with the heroine, Bathsheba Everdene. On the one hand, she has a host of masculine activities, and at the same time possesses an enormous capacity to attract others due to her feminine charm.

Bathsheba has a deep concern and responsibility for the completion of her familial work. "Bathsheba is always trying to be responsible; it is in affairs of heart that she is so vulnerable and irresponsible" (Gibson xxv). Being a Victorian female, she has some weaknesses no doubt. But she has the full determination to do what was generally considered the duties of a husband while protecting the ricks against the coming storm. She presents her capacity for friendship and cooperation which is really praiseworthy. She recognizes the side (weak side) of her own sexuality in confessing to Gabriel that she needs someone to tame her, and, paradoxically, she seems to need to be dominated sexually while herself dominating others as the mistress of the farm" (Gibson xxx). Her female weakness is visible when she reveals that she had asked to marry Troy out of jealousy, "When he had suddenly said that day seen a woman more beautiful than I, and that his constancy could not be counted on unless I at once became his ...And I was grieved and troubled" (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 200). Bathsheba has the feeling of remorse when she remembers her hasty judgment to marry Troy only because of female jealousy. Troy lay drunk and motionless with the workers totally unconcerned about the familial problems "Troy lies in a drunken sleep, surrounded by the workfolk whom he has irresponsibly made drunk by forcing on them brandy" (Gibson xxv) in the critical situation. Bathsheba

would expect help from her husband at the time of storm to defend the ricks but it was in vain:

‘I can not find my husband. Is he with you?’

‘He is not here.’

‘Do you know where he is?’

‘Asleep in the barn.’

‘He promised that the stacks should be seen to, and now they are all neglected! (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 197)

First of all, the evidence of masculinity is clear in the eyes of the workers of farm. When she first comes to visit her workers as the owner of the Weatherbury Farm, Joseph Poorgrass addresses her as ‘sir’ (66) Another worker separates her from the rest of her sex saying, “She never do tell women’s little lies, that’s true...” (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 310). Secondly, she is considered to be a male thief or possibly a gypsy by her workers when she drives her horse at night to visit Troy in Bath. Her plan to drive to Bath to visit Sergeant Troy is really bold and masculine. The painstaking scheme, though it seemed impossible she completed it anyway. The plan to drive such a long distance by a single lady at night time was against the general rule of the society. Coggan, when they (Coggan and Oak) reached Bathsheba after a long chase thinking the horse might have been stolen by the gypsy, commented in this way, “Ladies don’t drive at these hours, miss, as a general rule of the society”(*Far From the Madding Crowd* 168).

We see something more in Bathsheba as she does not like to be possessed by the male as their private belonging. She neither wants to be supported financially by the male nor likes to be just a handmaid of the males. Her reaction to patriarchy and commoditization of female is conspicuously visible through this expression, “I hate to

be thought men's property in that way, though possibly I shall be had some day" (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 24). Gender ideologies have been created by the dominant male and the female are muted since they can not express their will and ideas about reality at the deep level. She expresses her ideas that the channels of communication controlled by the males don't let females express themselves. Women may have no means of encoding them linguistically; they have to translate their ideas into male made channels. Bathsheba's reply to Boldwood's proposal for marriage is rather sharp and original:

'Do you like me, or do you respect me?'

'I don't know— at least I can not tell you. It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs.' (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 295)

With the expression Bathsheba comes forth with strong opposition to patriarchal domination in language. The expression clearly shows how females were barred from expressing their feelings. Bathsheba's expression summarizes that unless the views of women are presented in a form acceptable to men they will not be given a proper hearing. The man-made language for the women is not reasonably worthy for the woman to express their feelings.

A big share of land in the name of a woman was uncommon in the Victorian society. The patriarchy that expected male inheritance in the property is challenged by Bathsheba owning a large part of the Weatherbury land. Here, Bathsheba, adopting a male's profession, seems really masculine. She shares a great responsibility in the society as the owner of the farm. She is not a female to be frightened. "Don't think I am a timid woman and can't endure things" (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 199). The bailiff who does misdeed is caught and dismissed immediately by her. And that she is

firm to look after the work of the bailiff by herself is the a matter of astonishment to all her workers. “The bailiff is dismissed for thieving, and that I have formed a resolution to have no bailiff at all, but to manage everything with my own head and hands. The men breathed an audible breath of amazement” (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 61). The men do so because they do not believe a female can control the whole farm. But to their surprise Bathsheba’s speech is really persuasive, full of zeal and determination. “I shall be up before you are awake: I shall be afield before you are up; and I shall have breakfasted before you are afield. In short I shall astonish you all” (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 66). Bathsheba’s masculinity becomes conspicuous as she warns her men in a very masculine way:

Now you have a mistress instead of a master I don’t yet know my powers or my talents in farming; but I shall do my best, and if you serve me well, so shall I serve you. Don’t any unfair ones among you (if there are any such, but I hope not) suppose that because I’m a woman I don’t understand between bad goings and good. (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 65)

Gabriel Oak watched Bathsheba throughout the proceedings while she was distributing the wages to her workers at her own farm. And Gabriel was enormously astonished at her self-confidence. “Gabriel was rather staggered by the remarkable coolness of her manner” (64). Bathsheba was determined to do the dealing of exchange in Casterbridge market personally. She was taking full charge of her business since she would employ no bailiff. Accordingly, she went to the corn exchange as the corn market was called at Casterbridge on the following market day:

She acquired confidence enough to speak and reply boldly to men merely known to her by hearsay. Bathsheba too had her sample-bags,

and by degrees adopted the professional pour into the hand—holding up the grains in her narrow palm for inspection, in perfect Casterbridge manner. (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 71)

The activities of Bathsheba with the role of a personage capable of giving employment to the shepherd, discharging of the dishonest bailiff and paying the labourers in person give us the impression of her masculinity. Her appearance in the corn market to do business with men, and at the head of the table at the harvest festival as patron of the feast contributes to building up her personality of masculine impressiveness.

Troy is shot dead by Boldwood, and Bathsheba sends Oak to fetch the surgeon. The dead body should have been in Boldwood's house where the murder took place until the legal formalities were completed. But Bathsheba acted with extraordinary courage and masculinity. She undressed Troy's dead body and wrapped it up in grave clothes and took it to her own house before the surgeon and the priest arrived at Boldwood house, so they had to go to Bathsheba's. In doing so, she showed a strong nerve. "It is all done, indeed as she says, remarked Mr Aldritch, in a subdued voice. The body has been undressed and properly laid out in grave clothes. Gracious Heaven – this mere girl! She must have the nerve of a stoic!" (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 302). Instead of being weak and giving up the guidance to others she took command of the situation with such manly self-confidence. It makes us suspect her gender identity.

On the other hand, "Troy is irresponsible in love and irresponsible as the master of the farm..." (Gibson xxv). Troy marries her not to share a husband's love and responsibility but to have someone who will maintain him. This shows that he is incapable of establishing independent roots or doing fruitful labour that a Victorian

husband would be expected to fulfil. However, he could not be the parasite to the host, Bathsheba, any longer after Boldwood murders him with his gun. Troy deserves this fate since he is not fit to live as a husband depending on a female. He annoys Bathsheba by asking her for large amounts of money frequently, and he also blames her that she has disturbed his beautiful world with Fanny, whom he loved more than Bathsheba. At this point Troy seems feminine as he depends on others financially, on one hand, and masculine in the sense that he blames Bathsheba like a Victorian male, on the other.

Here, in the text, the femininity seems to be dominated, and masculinity resurfaced. This point might make many of the critics read it as a sign of male taming and re-assertion of male power. Such an analysis of gender ideology, in which women are always sketched as passive and innocent, is not to the point of satisfaction since Bathsheba is not always like that. Towards the end of the novel, she is not limited into the domestic sphere. One of the biggest challenges she poses to the Victorian society is that she is like a flirting lady. Here, she violates the Victorian norm of one husband one wife as she has an affair with Boldwood and marries first Troy and then Oak. All the above examples deny Bathsheba's role of the feminine kind. But these activities make us think her position surely to challenge the existing female roles given in Victorian society. Bathsheba challenges the false position constructed for the females by the selfish males and hers is a courageous masculine deed.

3.2 Gabriel Oak's Feminine Traits

In *Far From the Madding Crowd* Gabriel Oak's gender roles pose some complexities when compared with the Victorian male nature. Somewhere he seems to be masculine as he tries to control and dominate female power whereas somewhere he looks like a Victorian woman because of his submissive nature. When he loses most

of the sheep in a tragedy, he gets relief thinking that he has not been married yet. “Thank God I am not married! What she would have done in the poverty now coming upon me” (30). The expression makes it clear that female can do nothing at the time of hard luck since they are sentimental and weak. He evaluates the female as if she was fully dependent on male and can not stand on her own feet. Oak seems to say that female is a weaker sex unable to bear misfortune. Furthermore, the expression encapsulates the view that females are objects to bedeck the houses rather than assist her husband in the times of trouble. The view is rather Victorian. At this point Oak sounds as if he were a stern supporter of patriarchy– a cold domineering male.

Oak evaluates and characterizes Bathsheba in a fairly Victorian manner. At first, he fails to see the variety and scope that lies in Bathsheba but looks at her with a domineering gaze. He is left far behind when his conclusion of Bathsheba is rather customary and hastily prepared. He limits her to the female race and opines that their beauty plays key role to decide their character and pattern of behaviour. He indulges himself in a formulaic Victorian view that Bathsheba is vain of her beauty since she is just a woman:

The gatekeeper surveyed the retreating vehicle. ‘That’s a handsome maid,’ he said to Oak

‘True, farmer.’

‘And the greatest of them is-well, what it is always.’

‘Beating people down? Ay, ‘tis so.’

‘O no.’

‘What, then?’

Gabriel, perhaps a little piqued by the comely traveller's indifference, glanced back to where he had witnessed her performance over the hedge, and said, 'Vanity.' (7)

The language of the narrator and the images presented in the text make us create a complex Bathsheba, a character merely dominated by vanity. The word "handsome" (7) for the maid used in the above lines blurs the femaleness of Bathsheba. The word handsome when used of women means attractive with large strong features rather than small delicate ones. It means she is not delicate like a female but strong like a male even in her physique. While going through the text, we feel we must blame Oak for his rash judgment on Bathsheba, who has something more, not only vanity for her beauty. Oak, here fails to make a right judgment. His evaluation of Bathsheba is rather superfluous. Oak's assessment can not be granted as the final one when the narrator describes Bathsheba:

She simply observes herself as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind, her thought seeming to glide into far-off though likely dramas in which men would play a part- vistas of probable triumphs- the smiles being a phase suggesting that hearts were imagined as lost and won.

(Far From the Madding Crowd 6)

Oak seems to indulge himself in the stereotypical view while judging the character of Bathsheba and here he does not recognize her well enough to make the responsible judgment. The language of the narrator and Oak's perspective do not match accurately, rather the narrator looks reluctant to support Oak's view of Bathsheba as a woman dominated by her vanity, but more complex and more difficult to grasp than Oak presumes. She may have the vanity but she is there is something more that brings real confidence in her womanhood. Oak judges Bathsheba from the

outer world. But, selecting this language, to represent Bathsheba's inner world, the narrator presents us a sight to look at her that is beyond Oak's reach.

Oak's dealing with Fanny Robin when he meets her at night shivering with cold is also encircled with the Victorian philosophy of patriarchy. He assumes the female just as a being that is always in need of care and economic support of male. His giving of a trifle to Fanny without being asked for it shows that females are like beggars who are entirely under the compassion of male for their living. He thinks Fanny Robin is just a victim of poverty:

'You ought to have a cloak on such a cold night,' Gabriel observed.

'I would advise 'ee to get indoors.'

'O no! Would you mind going on and leaving me? I thank you very much for what you have told me.'

'I will go on.' he said; adding hesitatingly, 'Since you are not very well off, perhaps you would accept this trifle from me. It is only a shilling, but it is all I have to spare.' (41)

One of the best examples of Oak's masculine behaviour is that he courageously set out to put out the fire set on Bathsheba's estate. He not only incites other people to extinguish the fire but also commits himself to the mission at the cost of his life:

Oak seized the cut ends of the sheaves, as if he were going to engage in the operation of 'reed-drawing', and digging in his feet, and occasionally sticking in the stem of his sheep-crook, he clambered up the beetling face. He at once sat astride the very apex, and began with his crook to beat off the fiery fragments which had lodged thereon, shouting to the others to get him a bough and a ladder, and some water.
(37)

These are the examples to prove his masculine nature as specified by the Victorian society. In spite of these masculine characteristics displayed by Oak, he has some characteristics opposite to those which the contemporary culture would bestow on a male. He behaves in a passive or modest way. Oak's passivity and modesty belong to the gender role that Victorian people attributed to the female. Oak, opposite to Hardy's protagonist, Michael Henchard, in *Mayor of the Casterbridge*, who attempts to repress the females, tries to repress his male desire. When Oak notices Boldwood's sudden and commanding appearance at the time of sheep shearing, he burns with jealousy owing to the sight of Bathsheba sitting with Boldwood and engaging in whispered conversation. The degree of jealousy in Oak was so great that he was disturbed and could not do his job properly. The situation is well reflected when the narrator remarks, "Oak's eyes could not forsake them; and in endeavoring to continue his shearing at the same time that he watched Boldwood's manner, he snipped the sheep in the groin" (116). Oak's act seems to be a consequence of jealousy. But he fails to articulate his male desire accurately and keeps the internal feelings undisclosed to Bathsheba. At the same time his masculinity gets expressed in his monologue, "She herself was the cause of the poor ewe's wound, because she had wounded the ewe's shearer in a still more vital part" (116). Oak represses not only the male's desire but also wounds the female sentiment. His manliness and power are not asserted with display of masculinity.

Oak likes Bathsheba but can not propose her to marry him. This shy nature of Oak tends to be a feminine characteristic which is commented by the heroine, Bathsheba as, "Because you never ask." (313) when Oak ultimately proposes her hand in marriage. Bathsheba first proposes Oak for marriage but Oak can not do it at first in spite of being a Victorian male. Instead, he keeps his feelings to Bathsheba secret.

"Oak is compared to a mother as he advises her (Bathsheba) about marriage"

(Mistichelli 54). The narrator compares Oak to a mother as he advises Bathsheba about her marriage. Oak is feminine since he, like a female, represses his desire in his heart for Bathsheba and can not save her from the treacherous and cunning Sergeant Troy. Oak, here, is as weak or timid as a female. He does not completely deserve the male gender roles expected by the Victorian society.

Like Oak, Poorgrass is also shy. He has never been able to look at the face of a woman. Whenever he saw a woman he would blush like a woman. His painful shyness has been sympathized by the villagers in the following way:

Such a modest man as he is! Said Jacob Smallbury. 'Why? Ye've hardly had strength of eye enough to look in our young nis'ess's face, so I hear, Joseph?'

All looked at Joseph Poorgrass with pitying reproach.

'No- I've hardly looked at her at all,' simpered Joseph, reducing his body smaller whilst talking, apparently from a meek sense of undue prominence. 'And when I seed her, 'twas nothing but blushes with me!'

'Poor feller,' said Mr Clark.

''Tis a curious nature for a man,' said Jan Coggan.

'Yes' continued Joseph Poorgrass- his shyness, which was so painful as a defect, filling him with a mild complacency now that it was regarded as an interesting study. "'Twere blush, blush, blush with me every minute of the time, when she was speaking to me.'

'I believe ye, Joseph Poorgrass, for we all know ye to be a very bashful man.' (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 45-46)

This character also adds another brick to dismantle the traditional gender role. Bathsheba's activities mostly generate a great fascination and surprise in Oak. He observes her secretly from a distance or without letting her know about his being there. Oak picked the fallen hat of Bathsheba and waited patiently peeping through a hole of his hut. He found her acting in a most unexpected way:

The girl who wore no riding- habit, looked around for a moment, as if to assure herself that all humanity was out of view, then dexterously dropped backwards flat upon the pony's back, her head over its tail, her feet against its shoulders, and her eyes to the sky. The rapidity of her glide into this position was that of a kingfisher- its noiselessness that of a hawk. Gabriel's eyes had scarcely been able to follow her.

(14)

Now, what Oak has found in Bathsheba in the first meeting has mostly been changed. His outlook on Bathsheba as a woman full of female vanity for her beauty is now challenged, "Oak was amused, perhaps a little astonished ..." (14) due to the unconventional presentation of the female act of riding on the horseback in a masculine way. Oak took the fallen hat of Bathsheba and waited for her beside the path by which he expected her to go back. She got surprised with the sight of a stranger on the way and their eyes met. "Yet it was the man who blushed, the maid not at all" (*Far From the Madding Crowd* 15). Gabriel is too shy to make bold advances as any other young man would have done under the circumstances. Yet, Bathsheba was not a shy girl by any means. "And it is Oak; the narrator makes it a point of saying, who blushes in Bathsheba's presence, not she in his" (Mistechelli 54). Oak, in the novel, has not presented the feminine traits with his own volition to challenge the contemporary society to dismantle the traditional gender roles, but he is

naturally submissive like a female. Unlike Bathsheba, he has not presented the opposite gender roles consciously to challenge the old tradition but, it is Hardy who challenges the old tradition presenting Oak with feminine traits.

Studying the characters in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, we can conclude that they challenge the existing system of gender roles. We find Bathsheba acting as a male and Gabriel like a female. Hardy reverses the conventional gender roles, and he is in the sense far ahead of his time. At a time when sex and gender meant the same, he was artistic enough to show the difference between the two.

CHAPTER FOUR

Significance of Challenges to the Traditional Gender Concept

By the end of the nineteenth century, the domestic ideal so cherished by the Victorians had begun to loosen up. Nineteenth-century views on natural gender and sexuality, with their stereotypes about proper gender roles and proper desires, lingered long into the twentieth century and continued, somewhat erratically, to inform the world in which we live. In the Victorian Age, a masculine gender role might have been more desirable in academic and work settings because of their demands for action and assertiveness. Victorians found that masculine individuals had higher expectations than their counter parts for being able to control the outcomes of their academic efforts than feminine individuals.

In spite of the prevalent gender and sexual ideologies of his days, Hardy does not believe in a dialectical theory of power where one sex oppresses the other. He, through his novel, views that power shifts nature from one gender to another, one sex to another as it is gained and lost that across the boundaries of gender, age and class. The world he perceives is rather inconsistent, illogical and artificial. The novel, presents us with a tumultuous view of the late- Victorian world of gender and power.

However, one of the biggest and most prevalent notions in contemporary Victorian culture is the idea that there existed two separate and mutually exclusive opposite genders, masculinity and femininity. This gender dualism is not only false but also very harmful. One strategy to overcome this wrong concept is the idea of gender reconstructing, by which masculinity and femininity are not conceived as opposite ends of one spectrum, but as two separate spectra; we can be or have both at once (or neither), not only the one or the other. Thus, we can combine the various

components of masculinity and femininity in any number of ways, according to the individual preferences, needs and nature.

Some people think that the concept of gender reconstructing does not go far enough; because it still reproduces elements of the old false split of femininity and masculinity. It should be abandoned. What we need is not to construct combinations of two false concepts, but to go back to - and forward to - a situation with no split in the first place, a place without a gender dichotomy. The point is that keeping the masculine and the feminine apart and separate is what is inhumane and unnatural, while keeping them together is humane and natural. We must thus move beyond the biased concepts created by the society, in order to overcome the cultural and social abyss of gender dualism.

Basically, gender dichotomy must be healed and sealed: people must be free to develop them and to create their own unique identity. For this, they should be free to choose their roles in the society. But the roles in the society have been long traditionalized and labeled in most of the sectors. Giving roles on the basis of culture, regardless of the nature, has gradually become meaningless. Though there is the dichotomy of natural sex—male female— there should not be constructional dichotomy since women are also capable of working like men.

So, it's the need of the time and the society to renovate or recreate gender, put it in a new perspective on gender, and treat both the male and the female equally in the society. It is important not only to deconstruct the gender ideology but also to reconstruct it. The society, more precisely needs the deconstruction of the current arbitrary and collectivist gender bi-polarization ideology, and open itself for the reconstruction(s) of gender. The novel, against the gender ideologies of the contemporary Victorian society, dismantles the stereotyped gender roles and helps

reconstruct the power and position of both the male and the female on the basis of equality of axis and the socio-political aspects of gender.

The notions of various religions, where males are worshipped for their power has been challenged by the novel. The novel makes justice in gender treatment which neither shows male as thoroughly masculine or female as thoroughly feminine. It has broken the bonds of gender and sex in the connection of male and female potentialities. Both Oak and Bathsheba, in the novel, seem continuously to be destabilizing the stereotyped gender roles. They have created a big question over Victorian gender ideologies and stood for opposite gender roles to play. Quite opposite to the prior feminist reading which has made power alignment with the male domination against victimization of the female, linking the cultural construction of gender with the biological sex, Hardy's treatment of gender is very subtle, mobile and insightful. Hardy fragments the monolith of patriarchy and creates room for female resistance and power.

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