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AN OVERVIEW OF HUMAN AND NATURE IN THOMAS HARDY'S NOVEL,
THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

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Abstract

This research article examines, Thomas Hardy's *The return of the Native* and his view about Egdon Heath and its contact with human beings. In all his novels, nature was not even used as a background but also it plays a predominant role. Hardy opines that nature is seems to be a system and it consists of human attitudes and it modifies it and it have the power to controls it. It reveals the portrayal of human being's real position in nature by focusing on Egdon Heath. Hardy is notified as a gifted artist, because his words play in his hands and he manipulates the language in different ways to bring the variety of effects. Hardy explores the sympathy of nature. Nature depicted by Egdon Heath takes on the part of an impact on relationships, environment, circumstances and also the portrayal of unchanging nature of human experience. It insists that, directly and indirectly nature creates an impact in everyone's life. Hardy always stresses that there should be a beautiful bond between nature and man to lead a peaceful life.

Keywords: Nature, Egdon Heath, Rustics, Village, Love, Marriage, Sympathy

Thomas Hardy has been widely acknowledged as one of the most famous novelists a poet and a dramatist in English Literature. He is highly known as the father of literature. He has written several poems, three volumes of short stories and fourteen novels. Most of the works of Hardy, based on the themes like nature and landscape. Description of scenery, nature and the image of landscape spread all over his novels. His affection towards nature only made him to write novel related to natural scenes. In all his novels, nature was not even used as a background but also it plays a predominant role. Because, according to Hardy Nature is seems to be a system and it consists of human attitudes and it modifies it and it have the power to controls it.

On the other side, the functions of nature are explored as a mysterious force. Because in some situation, nature helps human beings to overcome their problems and sometimes it turns against human also. The novel, *The Return of the Native*, importantly portrays the mysterious force of nature. It also focuses on how the characters in the novel react towards nature. Through this novel, Hardy explores his own perspective about environment and its connectivity with the characters. The central setting of the novel is the representation of Egdon Heath which is a living character in this novel. It talks about the relationship between nature and human being. The novel, *The Return of the Native* insists that, directly and indirectly nature creates an impact in everyone's life. Here, Hardy emphasizes certain human characters with the elements of nature. It

reveals the portrayal of human being's real position in nature by focusing on Egdon Heath.

Hardy's attitude towards life is marked as a different one while comparing with other contemporary writers. Mostly Hardy's character belongs to countryside or village. In some of his novel Hardy deals with the dispute between the city and country side. Moreover, he introduces a group of rustic people who are all very frequent source of pity and humor sense. Those rustics people acted as a chorus and they will comment on the actions of the main characters. Actually, Hardy was born and brought up in the country side along with the beautiful scenes. Usually, he mentions nature in Wessex, not only a background but also it is an unconcerned observer of human turmoils. Egdon Heath plays a major role in this novel and it is not just an inanimate thing but also it has sentiment, feelings and it also speaks. Thomas Hardy give the description of Egdon Heath in the following manner,

A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath embrowned itself moment by moment. Overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was as tent which had the whole heath for its floor [Hardy, 3].

The characters in the novel views Egdon Heath in a different point of view. The main character Eustacia sees Egdon Heath as a prison and she wants to leave the place and wishes to settle in foreign country. At the end, Egdon swallows her in its pool and along with her, her lover Widgeon jumps into that pool to save her. On the other side, Mrs. Yeobright, a person does not have any intention to harm anybody, but finally killed by Egdon. Sometimes Egdon Heath seems to safeguard and nurture the people those who love nature and Egdon. Clym Yeobright is a person one who feels disgusted with the corrupt city life and decides to come to Egdon to progress the superstitious rustics. So Egdon acts very kind towards Clym. These are all main characters in the novel who loved Egdon and as a response, Egdon safeguard the people from evil. Thomasin and Diggory Venn are the another two charcters

rewarded at the end of the novel, only because of their affection towards Egdon. Finally, they marry each other and settled in Egdon to enjoy the rustic atmosphere, where they were born and brought up. Chaudhuri states that,

First, Hardy portrayed with amazing accuracy and almost scientific precision all the processes of nature. Second, he constantly stresses the inter-relation of man and nature. Third, he depicts nature as a vast, impassive organism living her own immense life and careless of that of man [30].

Almost, in all his novels, Thomas Hardy depicts natural scenery in a simple manner. The significant plot deals with Clym Yeobright and Eustacia. The title, *The Return of the Native* itself is a reference to Clym. According to Eustacia, Egdon Heath is an enemy because in the scene of storm, the heavy rain seems to be a horror one which intentionally destroys her. Hardy explain the beauty of nature through his majestic words, "it was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature- neither ghastly, hateful nor ugly, neither common place, unmeaning, nor tame; but like man slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysteries in its swarthy monotony" [Hardy, 5].

To escape from Egdon heath, Eustacia planned to marry Clym then only she can lead her life happily in Paris. But unfortunately, things take reverse against her wishes. After marriage Clym loses his eyesight also. Before marriage she fell in love with Widgeon and to get material prosperity she fails to follow the culture and tradition of Egdon Heath. Again, she started to bring back her attention to Widgeon. Even both of them plans to elope and decides to settle in America. At that time, Egdon Heath turns against her wishes and without knowing she fall into a deep pool and drowned in that pool. At last, Widgeon, lover of Eustacia jumps into that to save her but he is also drowned. So, the two major characters in the novel, met with a tragic end. Widgeon is also a married man but he was charting his wife. The characters those who are fails to obey the culture Egdon, only faces the tragic fate at the end. Margaret Drabble says,

Hardy wrote about nature because he was a country man. Unlike most of his predecessors he was born in a rural, though not isolated district, in an exceptionally attractive part of our country, where nature lay around him... he could hardly have avoided it. He was also one of the very few novelists whose origins could have been described, however, slightly as, 'working class', a fact about which in later life, he was to prove sensitive... he was familiar with the cycle of the seasons and the duties attached to each time of the year in each rural occupation [163].

Here, the sub plots discuss about the characters like, Mrs. Yeobright, her niece Thomasin and Diggory Venn. Mrs Yeobright is an aged woman, mother of Clym. Thomasin was fall in love with Widleve, on hearing this Mrs Yeobright is displeased with her, because the latter wants to marry the bloody Widleve. She thinks that, her son never cares about herself and she determined to leave the house in the dark and died by a snake. After the death of Widleve, his wife Thomasin willingly marries Diggory Venn and lead her life contentedly with him. Thomas Hardy explains the customs and traditions of the rustics of Egdon Heath. There are some of the customs mentioned in the novel, like, the mummer's performance, the Maypole celebrations, annual bonfire on the fifth November to commemorate the Gunpowder plot. The rustics highlighted in the novel are notified as the authors mouthpiece. Because often, the rustic characters put comments on the positive and negative side of the main characters. So, the rustics acted as a connective point between the main plot and sub-plot. At the end, Egdon Heath wipes out the characters who are all unfavorable to it.

Hardy is notified as a gifted artist, because his words play in his hands and he manipulates the language in different ways to bring the variety of effects. Hardy explores the sympathy of nature. He states that the closer the man to nature, the more kind to him. There are many examples in this novel which proves that the nature is very sympathetic towards human actions. The bond between Egdon and Clym reveals through the following words,

At length Clym reached the magic of a fir and beech plantation that had been enclosed from heath land in the year of his birth. Here, the trees ... were now suffering more damage... the wet young beeches were undergoing amputations, bruises, crippling's, and harsh lacerations, from which the wasting sap would bleed for many a day to come, and which would leave scars visible till the day of their burning. Each stem was wrenched at the root ... convulsive rounds came from the branches as if pain were felt. In a neighbouring brake a finch was trying to sing; but the wind blows under his feathers ... twiated round his little tail, and made him give up his song [220-221].

Nature is not only kind towards the lover of Egdon but also very sympathetic with others those who hates Egdon Heath. Nature depicted by Egdon Heath takes on the part of an impact on relationships, environment, circumstances and also the portrayal of unchanging nature of human experience. To explore the relationship between Clym and Eustacia, Hardy uses moon as a reference and insists that moon is another kind of nature. It denotes the hour of bliss and the eclipse of the moon is symbolized in this novel. Nature is very humanized and each and every work of hardy represent nature in every page of his novel.

Hardy gave human qualities to nature like faces, eyes and tongues like human being. According to Hardy nature is a very big force and it has possessed with many faces and ambivalent attitudes. In some situation it is very benevolent to humans and in some occasion, it is highly cruel and indifferent to others. People who can adopt easily nature may lead a happy life along with the beauty of nature. People who are not ready to accept nature may even destroyed. Hardy always stresses that there should be a beautiful bond between nature and man to lead a peaceful life.

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