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Searching for the Self in the Novels of Thomas Hardy from the Existential Lenses

Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh

Assistant Professor,

Department of English,

MHPG College, Moradabad,

U.P., India

Email Id: dksinghdharmendra@gmail.com

ORCID Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1333-810X>

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Abstract

'*Aham Brahmasmi*', the soul of 'Hindu and Yoga' philosophy, reveals the integrity of the Atman (self or soul) with Brahman (the Absolute). Unless and until, one understands AHAM (self), one can't attain one's BRAHMAN (Absolute). Not to talk about sages and seers, this 'Absolute' is nothing but a desired destination for a common man. The literature of the world is nothing, but the literature of the man, the literature of the choice, the literature of the free will, and the literature of the self—authentic and inauthentic. It is the self that makes and mars the man. This is why 'Self' has been a thing of debate since the rays of cultures and civilizations fall on the pious ground of this blue planet. Seeing all this, an attempt is made to describe in brief the 'Self' along with its various types. Why it is called an omnipresent thing and how it is an impersonator, is the next thing. It is also in the crux of this exploration. What the various theories along with the various theorists are related to it, is also aimed to mention in this paper. What the 'Searching for the self' or 'self-searching' is, and what the existential thinkers think

about the self, is the prime of the present paper. The essential thing here is to shed light on how the major novels of Thomas Hardy are about 'Self-Searching' along with its examining through the existential lenses.

Keywords: *Priori, Dasein, En/Pour-Soi, Facticity, Forfeiture, Nostalgie, Terrain*

The 'Self' which is also known as *Atman, Prusha*, Person, Spirit, and Consciousness stands for 'one's own person. Despite being subjective, it remains far away from subjectivity. It is nothing but the reflection of individual's consciousness in which the individual always remains as an object. As a concept, it is omnipresent because of its presence in psychology, sociology, Philosophy, religion and science—neuroscience—*enter alia*. It is an impersonator as it changes its meaning and sense in various fields: in psychology, it is the study of cognitive and affective representation of one's identity; in sociology, it is a dynamic responsive process of structuring neural pathway according to past and present environments including material, social, and spiritual aspects; in science—neuroscience, it is the study of the two areas of brain—medical prefrontal cortex and posterior parietal cortex; in philosophy, it seeks to describe the essential features that constitute a person's uniqueness—essential being. While in religion, it is a complex and core subject of the various forms of spirituality. Hitherto, it is of two types- 'the self' (ego) and the 'true self' (observing self or real self). In Hinduism, it is ATMAN'(web.). The concept of 'Self', because of its complex nature has been a matter of debate from the time immemorial. From time to time, the sages and seers not only in India but also across the world have tried to decipher and define it in their own ways. Although its complexity has made it more and more complex, yet Socrates with his injected concept of 'Know Thyself', Lord Buddha with his concept of 'No Self', Adi Shankaracharya with his concept of 'Self Knowledge', Kant with his thought of 'Rational Agent', Aristotle with his definition of 'Psyche', Hume with his 'Bundle Theory of Self', and Dennett with his theory of 'Self as a Narrative Center of Gravity' have directly or indirectly tried to decipher and define and open this Gordian knot of the SELF.

As a philosophy, Existentialism is not untouched from having a glance over the 'self'. It too focuses upon the existence of human being and tries to clear how humanity is unique. In doing so, it also talks about the fact and fiction of the 'self'. Here, the interesting thing to disclose is that the core concept of the existentialists is the 'existential self' that thinks 'self-as-a doer' and 'self-as-an object' and 'self as authentic' and 'self as inauthentic'. According to them Individual's experience is caused by one's intentions or goals, not by one's self definition.

Now, there is need to clear the term 'search for the self' or 'self-searching.' It examines individual's motives, thoughts, feelings, values, and actions done by the individual in usual as well as specific course of time and coincidence which offers a medium for introspection. Feeling of anxiety, anguish, boredom or alienation arises from man's awareness of life's absurdity. Man's search for the self to relieve the tension in which he always lives is another absurdity which has become an essential theme of Thomas Hardy's major novels. The freedom and responsibility of man as an individual is very important problem in existential writers.

Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher, and Soren Aabye Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher, theologian, and cultural critic, believe that “the essence of existentialism is an experience of freedom so unique that any attempt to fit it into a philosophical system is self defeating” (p.59). The freedom of action is noticeable particularly in one’s love-life where there is choice as well as will but lots of hindrances and obstacle to illuminate the self—authentic self.

Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre, French philosopher, novelist, and playwright, lays stress on the importance of freedom and responsibility of the individual. To him, “the reason for our acts is in ourselves. We act as we are. Our acts contribute to making us” (p.453). Man’s freedom is limited by *facticity* and possibility. On one side, man is free in projecting his possibilities. On the other side, he is considered by the factual situation. However, Man is the master of destiny and is free, free in any way, free to behave like a fool, or like a machine, free to accept anything, free to refuse anything. He can do what he likes as his doing depends on his liking.

According to Sartre, there are three distinct modes of being—being-in-itself (*En-soi*), being-for-itself (*Pour-soi*), and being-for-others (*Pour-autrui*). The first stands for the ‘being of things’, while the second stands for the ‘objects in the external world’ and third stands for ‘individual’s being that exists in another’s consciousness.’ It is to say that of the ‘for-itself’ which has to be what it is, i.e., which is what it is not, and which is not what it is, and that of the ‘in-itself’ which what is: objects having ‘being- ‘in-itself’ *en-soi*, people having ‘being-for-itself’, *Pour-soi* because consciousness exists for itself. Finally, there is ‘being for others’, *Pour-autrui* which means that we all exist in the eyes of the others, and our estimates of ourselves come from what other people think of us. Sartre’s *Pour-soi* “whose existence precedes essence” (p.52) corresponds to the ‘*authentic individual*’ of Kierkegaard and to the ‘*Dasein*’ of Heidegger. “Existence” means “here” and “now” of being and “essence” is the “what” of being. Man is a free individual in the sense of not being determined. He makes effort for essence in life. The *Pour-soi* gets defined in terms of negation and freedom. The *Pour-soi* comes into being (exist/emerges) by separating itself from the *en-soi*. The *en-soi* has its being in itself, and this is the essential being. The *Pour-soi* is free to choose its essence and its being is its freedom. Paradoxically, its freedom is also its lack of being. Sartre, like Kierkegaard has firm faith that there is an inner contradiction in existence. The dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness: to accept in freely, without any fear, without any illusion. In full awareness of the absurd, Sartre’s *Pour-soi* chooses for all men in choosing for himself. His existential freedom burdens him with a sense and responsibility for others. Further he says that “Man finds himself in an organized situation in which he himself is involved: his choice involves mankind in its entirety, and he can’t avoid choosing (p. 48).”

Jean-Paul Sartre believes that the freedom of man is in his/her self. There is no value, nor morality to lay down a *Priori* (morality). In each case, it is man who must decide alone without any basis, without any help and guidance of any person or thing. But it is unjust to call him capricious. Dostoevsky writes: “What is to become of men, then, without God and without a future life? Why, in that case, everything is allowed” (p.691). Man is trapped in the trap of

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fear and anxiety from the fact in making the choice. The *Pour-soi* is committing not only for himself but in a certain manner for all mankind. This anguished responsibility is brought on by the question of whether the concept or image of man he chooses himself is one that he can choose for all. This sense of responsibility excludes some choices. Sartre observes: “When a man commits himself to anything, fully realizing that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of making in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility” (p.30). Sartre says: “I am thus responsible for myself and all men and I am creating a certain image on man as I would have him to be. In fashioning myself, I fashion man” (p.30). Man’s freedom is complete and profound. There is nothing to assure him that he is on the right path or way. Awareness of the fundamental absurdities, according to Camus, is the measure of man’s achievement in the terms of knowledge. In the *Myth of Sisyphus* Albert Camus says that “No code of ethics and no effect are justifiable a priori in the face of cruel mathematics that command our condition” (p.6).

Man is nothing but what he does. Even his action does not fully define him because he is always free to redefine himself to reinterpret his past. Man is the future of himself. He is free and alone without assistance and without any excuse, condemned to decide without any support from any quarter. “Man will attain existence only when he is what he proposes to be” (p.30). Existential writes like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, and Dostoevsky endow man with potentiality, authenticity, and selfhood. Kierkegaard stresses the need of an individual for “My own little I.” According to Heidegger human existence is two- fold: subjective and objective. Subjectively, man surpasses the worldliness and crystallizes himself into a pure subject. Objectively, he is enticed by the limitations of the world and consequently, he remains in vacuity and nothingness. Heidegger’s being reaches solitary projection of himself into the future shaped by the fearful realization of his own destiny. Sartre categorizes the human being as inauthentic and authentic. The inauthentic being is lost in the crowd; the authentic chooses his destiny by involving into his objective situations. But according to Heidegger, there are two sorts of human existence—subjective and objective. The former makes one a pure subject while the latter gives nothing but vacuity and nothingness.

‘Search for the self’ has always been a major concern of the writers and philosopher both of the eastern and western countries. The writers have employed different methods to project characters’ ‘searching for the authentic selfhood’. There are, as W.J. Harvey points out, two sets of perspective about characters in fiction. The first set may be called ‘Perspective of Range’- in which none can spot motives hidden from the characters; we may even know the future towards which they move in their dramatic present. But there is the second kind – Perspective of depth- in which the characters are focused sharply and significantly before fading away again. These characters appear as strangers in the crowd and illuminate a new possibility of life. Dostoevsky and Proust are supreme in their mastery of this technique whereby one is suddenly plunged from shallowness to depth.

Now coming to Thomas Hardy, the late Victorian novelist, it can be said and has been said that his works have proved that he was for all waters in the area of existential concepts

and tenets related to the searching of the self. As Thomas Hardy has developed the two types of character in his novels, the protagonists and the background characters. The first set of characters plunge into their historical situation, and attempt a search for their self. The second set of characters get lost in the crowd and from an 'ant-hill society' (p.407). The fictional world of Hardy corresponds to the world portrayed in existential novels where the concentration to the novelist has shifted from portrayal of life in society to the exploration of the psyche.

Hardy's first published novel "*Desperate Remedies* has been well reviewed. The *Antheneum* and the *Morning Post* estimated it as "an eminent success", but The Spectator bitterly lashed it the reason for this being mainly the author's daring to suppose it possible that an unmarried lady owing an estate could have an illegitimate child. With perfect justice, Hardy calls *Desperate Remedies* a novel of "ingenuity". So ingenious it is with its plot and counterplots that it reminds the readers the novels of Dickens and Collins. There is a murder in it, and a sudden death, a concealed birth, and all the apparatus of the fiction that was popular then. Yet it contains the germ of the masterpiece. This novel is characteristic of Hardy. He managed to introduce into this book enough of his reading of life to make it "not unworthy of a little longer preservation." Here, undoubtedly, he is exemplifying portions of his philosophy through the speeches and actions of Edward Springrove, one of the chief characters of the fiction, who is an architect by profession and an idealist by nature. He is constantly in search of the 'something wanting' of his "alter ego". As his father once says that he is looking for perfection in things when there is none. But in the end, Springrove is disillusioned. Through such creation of his own, Hardy, like the existentialists, seems to suggest that 'idealism is useless.' Man is sincerely and deeply involved in life and seeks to find a true meaning of life from experience.

Cytherea who is the heroine of the novel, is by far most significant character. She illustrates the existential 'trait of choice' and 'freedom' in shaping her 'self'. Although she is put to horrible conditions of life and swinging like a pendulum between Springrove and Manston, she never loses the sight of her 'potential self.' If she could give in to be Manston's wife, it was purely on account of her ailing brother Owen, who otherwise was likely to die. But this act of hers never lost touch with her anguished self. However, the choice to marry between Springrove and Manston is entirely Cytherea's. It is she who decides to marry Manston in the larger and unselfish interest to save her brother. She accepts her responsibility for this terrible decision. She says it to Edward Springrove "I am to blame, Edward, I am." She said mournfully: 'I was taught to dread pauperism; my nights were made sleepless... the act is mine, after all, Edward, I married to escape dependence for my bread upon the whim of Miss Aldcliffe, or others like her" (p.283).

Cytherea shapes her future through choice and freedom. After her marriage with Manston, she declines to his proposal of flying away. Perceiving the void of life surrounding her she floats amidst the contingencies with nothing to anchor on, she realizes that her contingencies of life are too 'mournful and harassing'. The anchor seems to represent man's eternal quest for a permanent home. The notable thing is that her involvement in life, is in her full consciousness, and therein lies the tragedy of Cytherea. In fact, the novel offers the

quandary of human condition. In a sudden round up of events when Manston's secret is divulged and when he is dead, she marries Springrove. Cytherea's contingent situation reminds Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*. Siddhartha was the son of a Brahmin, born in the time of Buddha, leaves home on a quest for meaningful life. Asceticism fails him; Buddha fails him. Then he turns to the worldly life that fails too. After that he becomes a ferryman. The readers are waiting for to be told of a successful solution, and as the novel comes towards the end, he realizes that Hesse has nothing to offer. "The river flows on". Siddhartha contemplates it. Hesse arrives at the conclusion that there is no ultimate success or failure. He writes that "Life is like the river—its attraction is in the fact that it never stops flowing" (p.16). It is strange enough to find that the novel "Desperate Remedies" also ends with the flow of river in which Cytherea is anchorless and the river flows on and on quietly and obtusely as ever without any effect.

Aenease Manston is victim of 'cosmic absurdity'. He has a bitter taste of the labyrinth in which his life is cast. His mode of life drifts differently from others. The wisdom that he learns with a great shock is that people of the world live under the pressures of external forces and never peep within the 'self'. "When we survey the long race of men it is strange and still strange to find that they are mainly dead men who have scarcely ever been otherwise" (p. 407). Manston displays wonderful indifference to all the external circumstances, and when in a mysterious way his guilt is exposed, he faces death with all the dignity. Death seems to offer him bliss which he has failed to get in life with people 'almost always in their graves'. In this way death librates him from all the miseries of this world that is full of absurdity. Heidegger declares that death is the possibility of a being. The awakened Manston chooses 'sudden death', although he says that "there is no difference in the nature between 'sudden death' and death of any kind" (p.407). In his moment of truth, Manston comes to recognize 'man's life to be a wretchedly conceived scheme', and this is the reason he prefers to renounce it saying that "I am now about to enter on my normal condition, for people are almost always in their graves. When we survey the long race of men, it is strange and still more strange to find that they are mainly dead men, who have scarcely ever been otherwise" (p.319).

The critical reputation of *Far From the Madding Crowd* remains the most stable among the novels of Thomas Hardy. It is famous for its correlations between man's repetitious but sometimes forces of nature. *Far From the Madding Crowd* provides a positive aspect of existentialism. Gabriel oak takes 'a full look at the worst', and is fully conscious of his responsibility. He is always ready to deflect, to improve through his choice and freedom. The course of action that Oak took was nothing but a fight between a 'man's wisdom' and 'senseless circumstances.' His prevention of the fire from spreading to the Ricks and Bathsheba's farm in Chap.VI; his curing of the poisoned sheep in chap. XXI; his saving of Bathsheba's harvest from the storm in Chap. XXXVI; and his unsuccessful tries and efforts to intervene before Boldwood's optimistic disaster leading dreams in chap.LI, III, and VI. Oak thus puts himself against the whole scheme of things, the whole trend of circumstances. In fact, Hardy through Oak is suggesting that one should live with choice, freedom and responsibility choosing the course of his future life. The essential thing with Oak is not that he is in contact with nature, but that he is in contact with reality. He neither evades it nor resigns himself to it; he makes

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something out of it. Thus, through his ceaseless efforts and determination he first becomes a shepherd, a bailiff, the owner of Boldwood's farm and lastly Bathsheba's husband. The irony that is here is this that man fails through neglecting chances of success but Oak being practical and realist succeeds by his ingenuity in his life.

Boldwood has learnt from his experiences that hopes have always been stifled by some unforeseen troubles. This is why towards the end of the novel he is seen eagerly waiting for Bathsheba to fulfill his promise to marry her. He tells oak that he fears "And sometimes, when I am excessively hopeful and blithe, a trouble is looming in the distance: so that I often get to look upon gloom in me with content, and to fear a happy mood. Still, this may be absurd- I feel that it is absurd" (p.311). Although Boldwood here utters the word 'absurd', his fears are, however, not absurd. His sudden realization of the absurdity of his existence can be seen when after killing Troy with his gun, he tries to commit suicide but saved by one of his men. After that what he utters, consists absurdity. As Hardy writes: "Well, it makes no difference", Boldwood gasped, "There is another way for me to die" (p.331). His going over to Bathsheba, kissing her hand, and disappearing into the darkness of the night never to come back again, suggests a kind of philosophical suicide of the existential man which Thomas Hardy is presenting in this book. Not only the major characters like Blackwood, Bathsheba and Oak but also the minor character like Fanny Robin has recognizes the absurdity of their own. She is also in the same boat. Fanny, a pretty servant, loves Troy and becomes pregnant, and is deserted. She is an outcast seeking fulfillment of her 'self', without any help from one, finally succumbs death. In this way Far from the Madding Crowd clearly presents Hardy's concern with the freedom and independence of man as an individual. To him, in crisis man must depend upon himself to find a way out of confused state of things.

Now coming to, *The Return of the Native* that is Hardy's first sustained efforts at tragedy. Along with the concept of personality and awareness of the symbolic value of setting, this novel is also dealing with existential concepts presenting the death of older forms of perception in the struggle of survival in the modern world. The theme that this novel presents is of human confrontation with a situation along with individual's choice and freedom to be an authentic self. Edgon Heath, that is here a great tragic power, is not only a tract of land but also the cosmos that analyzes a wider assessment of the place of man in the cosmic scene. Presenting the tragic actions in three phases—the first being purpose and will of the major characters; the second being their experience of suffering; and the third that is of their acquiring the knowledge of the limitations of the word and of their power to change it—this novel parallels the three broad stages—original sin, damnation and transcendence –conform to the aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages of Kierkegaard and Heidegger's three aspects of being- facticity, forfeiture and existentiality — propounded by the existential thinkers and writers in the development of man's realization of his authenticity. Apparently, this novel presents three levels of existences: the world of the animals and the insects; the world of the human beings; and the world of the dreams, fantasies, superstitions, witchcrafts, nightmare mysteries, and childish credulity. Under the cosmic indifferences, the deeper truth of human existence is woven underneath its grab where the characters seek either to maintain a market personality or to transcend it.

Broadly speaking, the characters of the novel *The Return of the Native* falls into two categories: those who live a life of ‘bad faith’ being fully complacent and satisfied in their walled imprisonment of the human condition, and those who are busy in trying to be ‘potential’ and ‘authentic self’ by changing their conditions through ‘choice and action’. For instance, Eustacia Vye, a major and potential character of the novel, finds life ‘abandoned’ and ‘neglected’. She finds her surrounding unable to fulfill her subjective longing—her craving for happiness and fulfillment. Paris was her imagined place where she Endeavour’s to attain for the happiness of her ‘self’. Her problem is: how to be happy, how to exist a potential self? What happens to her in search of the truth needs a careful examination. She being a tragic victim finds a disharmony between the outer and inner world of her feeling. The outer world estranges her. Edgon becomes her Hades. The monotony and anguish of her existence on Heath repels her. The result is that she develops a harmony with the dead. She is found standing on a grave with which she is persistently associated throughout the novel. From neglect to contemplate death becomes to her the solution of life. Vye, a femme fatal, is longing to escape Edgon but finally destroyed. She was caught in the rat-trap of the cosmic absurdity of the Heath. The result is known to all. Clym Yeobright who is a counterpart to Vye, is also in the existential trap. His estrangement from the world is more pronounced because of the contrast between his feeling and observance. Most glittering aspects of this hollow world in Paris disillusioned him and sent him back to home. The sordidness and appearance of life revolted him. His long wandering into the ‘labyrinth’ taught him to be the well-wisher and lover not only of his fellow-brethren but also of his fellow mortals—animals and insects. He goes on doing well with his own shattered life because he is conscious of the horror of existence. This constant awareness of life’s horror has even affected his physical appearance, for thought is a disease of the flesh, of the evil in things. In spite of his heart being full of spirituality, he is an alienated being seeing the gross materialism of his world. He has a heart full of spirituality, but he has an acute sense of isolation in an alien society of an indifferent universe. In this way, Clym has seen life in its most civilized past, but finally come to realize its absurdity. He says that “the more I see of life, the more do I perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting” (p.222).

The next masterpiece of Hardy is *The Mayor of the Casterbridge: The Life and Death of a Man of Character*. This novel also treats the theme of freedom, action, choice of the individual and his/her attempt to transcend the pettiness of life. In it, search for the self can be observed clearly. This novel is not about the decay of a rural order and the clash about the personality, but about the terms of being –‘good’ and ‘bad’ characters (Henchard and Farfrae) or various distillations of this ethical spirit. The rise and fall of Henchard is the tracing out in a moment of time- the moment of the Cosmos. There are four movement of progressively diminishing lengths in this novel and each moment provides a common pattern: an initial situation which seems to offer some hope followed by event which creates doubt, fear, and anxious anticipations for an outcome that comes finally as a catastrophe. The protagonist of the novel Henchard’s resolution is to make a start in new direction in each movement of the novel, although he is thwarted by the ‘primitive hostility’ of the ‘cosmic scheme’. The first

movement of the novel depicts a situation which seems to offer him hope for his success, while the second movement of the novel presents Him worthy of the general approval of his creditors and renewed sympathy of the denizen his town, but the third movement of the novel depicts from hope to catastrophe for him. The final cycle of the novel again involves a movement in which he is seen longing for the lost things of the past, but his hopes and longings are turned down to catastrophe except that of not to be separated from Elizabeth. In this way this novel presents a terrible disproportion of intention and reality— what man deserves, and what man finds. Over all, he is caught amidst the forces beyond his control, and his only salvation is like Camus' 'Sisyphus' in transcending an impossibility in which he is condemned to be destroyed.

Besides Henchard, other characters also have to face the existential crisis. They also face the puzzle of the 'self', but characters like Lucetta lives in unawareness of her potential self. In this way present novel examines the nature of authentic and inauthentic existence and stresses the importance of man's reliance on his own internal resources to face the reality of life.

When *the Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented* is being looked into through the help of existential lenses, it is found that hitherto the characters face the existential crises. Their search for the self, their feeling of alienation, their anxiety and their angst, is very common like the characters of the other novels. The novel is the tragic tale of a characters (but especially of Tess), experiencing of authenticity and subjectivity in the mess of determinants. It stresses the desirability of individual freedom in shaping life. The novel's main emphasis is in the justification of individual's unique self as this novel illustrates the theme of existential freedom through characters. The major characters, Tess and Angel, learn the authenticity of life through experience. As Tess starts a life in such surroundings in which ideas and essences predominate: her father's dream of his ancestry, and her mother's dream of Tess' future as a 'lady', but she wants to lead a life in stark reality. The result is that she accepts her life as a dairy maid. Her determination to visit 'The Chase' to meet the rich lady Mrs. D'Urbervilles is purely her choice— her free commitment. She has a firm faith in the saying— there is no life without hope. She is fully aware of the absurdity of her existence despite the fact that she was an insignificant in this cosmic absurdity as 'a fly on a billiard-table of infinite'. She chooses the course of morality at Talbothays. The duality of her conscience nearly comes to an end when she chooses Angel as her husband, although it was never over. But the dread of the past still haunts her conscience— the authentic/inner self. She dreads to reveal the truth of her molestation yet maintains the image of being a pure woman. Tess at this stage tends to lead a life of 'bad faith' what existentialists call 'bogus existence'. Here she leads a double conscience—deceiver and deceived— at the same time. Here she feels like Kierkegaard's 'Either/Or' or Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' (p.144). Finally, she decides to tell Angel about her past leaving the cowardice and hesitation of her heart, although she knows the result because she knew well the nothingness of her existence. Doing so, she seeks to establish the essence of her life knowing that the existence and experience of life decide the mode of essence and value. Her decision was not taken in abstraction but in concrete situation along with a solid point of view of that situation. Hitherto, she plays the role of an actual, living and striving existential

thinker. Like Camus' Sisyphus she believes in the oddities of life and is afraid of the unknown, yet bears the irrational cosmic order.

Angel Clare, another major character of this novel, also bears the existential concern in his attitude to life. He refuses his father to be a part of social machinery, tries to find the meaning of life through a system of philosophy. Being an anti-conventional and untraditional, he refuses regulatory essence and principles of life. Instead, he chooses 'existence to precede essence'. The result is this that he leaps into the abyss of life. His visit to Brazil is only for seeing what life there is like, and this proves the saying of the existential thinkers—man's life is an attempt. He was an outsider in the world of the conformists. He is estranged from his wife, and from the customary professions, looking only his own existence with the passive interest of an outsider.

Jude the Obscure is the last novel by the pen of Thomas Hardy. The process of evolution is one of the important concerns in discerning the quality of the novel. It evinces increasingly personal and aesthetically undisciplined meditations of human fate and attacks on social institutions along with stressing still deeper issues, and corresponds to the modern theme of individual's search for identity. It illustrates the story of a lonely individual involved in a terrible personal struggle. Much of Jude Falwey's fight was with himself. A *nostalgie de bone* was stronger in Jude than in most men. He boldly chooses his life through freedom, choice and responsibility. He, leading a luckless existence, directly plunges into the unknown terrain of the predicament of the human existence of this world. He chooses his life and shapes his future. Entering the darker terrain of life's quandary, he gains wisdom, yet he is oppressed by forces from within and without. Though his hopes and desires are never more than partially realized, he always appears to be moral pioneer, striking out for the light. Jude foreshadows existential character who while seeking for his own life chooses an example for humanity. To him, revelation of the absurd is not a defeat, but an opportunity. This is why Jude Falwey going into a tunnel, unwraps the absurdity around his existence and justifies not only his way of living but also himself. Hitherto, he is cocksure of light and hope in the future 'at the far side of despair'. Although he dies, he does not leave hope for the bright future. His death with hope describes the bright side of the existential conditions. He says:

I am in chaos of principles-groping in the dark-acting by instinct and not after example. Eight or nine years ago, when I came here (Oxford) first, I had a neat stock of fixed opinions, but they dropped away one by one.... I perceive there is something wrong somewhere.... what it is can only be discovered by men or women with greater insight than mine (p.356).

Sue Bridehead who is often described as 'bodiless' and 'ethereal' in the novel *Jude the Obscure*, is the female protagonist of the novel, reflects existential struggle, existential Vacuum, and search for the self. Her tragic life is the result of her choice and freedom. Her inauthentic self – choice – makes her life tragic. Her choice to stay with the Jude whom she loves without marriage causes the death not only of her children but also of her principles, and of her love. Her choices become fatal and lethal to her. For it is very common in an existential life.

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In short, it can be said that like the existential writers, Thomas Hardy has faithfully depicted the mood of anxiety, boredom, and alienation of this absurd world in his major novels. The existential themes of the problem of absurdity, tension, and man's search for the self are in the core of his fictional world. The severity of circumstances and the superiority of the insurmountable power made Hardy feel man's helplessness in the universe. His characters have the existential feeling of absurdity and predicament. They struggle with the invisible forces of cosmos with their experience of anguish and alienation. They feel sickness unto death, i.e. whatever happens, happens. They are busy in their self-searching even at the cost of their life. Even though the various form of chances, accidents, coincidences, and natural calamities help them in their self-searching whether they make or mar them. But they help.

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