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Sub: [English Paper-IV Part-II]

Unit-5

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Topic: The Mayor of Casterbridge.

Q) In what ways may 'The Mayor of Casterbridge' be said to depict the fate of rural England as it is invaded by the new age?

Ans) We know that as a novelist, Hardy confines himself to one district of England, which he calls Wessex. About the Wessex life and its impact on Hardy, Lord David Cecil writes, "There was plenty of tragedy in the life of the Wessex labourers with its poverty and passion. Life to them was life in the raw. Dependent and ignorant, exposed alike to the oppressions of the social system and caprices of the weather, at every moment of their existence, the people among whom Hardy was brought up, were made conscious of man's helplessness in the face of circumstances."

Hardy being a part of this rural England has taken its leading characters men of powerful nature, men of the country, with little acquired virtues but disciplined by the experience of life. Similarly the

Character of Kenchard in "The Mayor of Castorbridge" has all these qualities. ~~The~~ The tragedy of Kenchard is largely ascribed to the fact that he is not able to adjust himself with the 'new' culture that comes to Castorbridge from outside. There is a clash between the old and the 'new'.

A careful study of Kenchard's character reveals that he stands for primitive characteristics. In a very real sense he is the symbol of agricultural England and his downfall is not only the downfall of a single man but the downfall of a whole way of life. He had his beginnings on the land and even his business is directly connected with the agriculture. Now if we look into the causes of Kenchard's downfall, we find that, apart from his own character, there are three contributing factors to his fall.

The first factor is Newson. It seems clear that had Newson not appeared on the scene the Kenchards would have lived together, if not happily, at least for ever after. At first Kenchard's offer to sell off Susan, ~~seems~~ his wife, it seems the most childish nature, but the arrival of Newson turns it into a grim reality. He does it in a drunken and senseless condition but Newson accepted this offer

in his complete sense. When Newson does take up Henchard's offer, "A stolid look of concern filled the husband's face, as if, after all, he had not quite anticipated this ending." He after coming to his sense, takes an oath, not to drink anymore. If Henchard is the symbol of primitive rural culture, Newson stands for the Modern idea industrialized age which is coming. Not only his name is Newson, New son but his ship travels back and forth from England to the New world. Moreover, since he is a sailor, he is a travelled man, a sophisticated person in comparison to Henchard. It is Newson who appears to turn the Skimmity ride from speculation to actuality and it is Newson who returns to take Elizabeth-Jane away from Henchard.

Farfrae is the second factor of Henchard's downfall. Apparently, his name reminds us that he has come from distance. In fact, he is an alien force in the rural society. Henchard and Farfrae are opposites. Farfrae symbolized New World. Henchard stops him from emigrating to America, and here by commits a great mistake. It is also true that Farfrae cannot be wholly blamed for Henchard's fall, rather Farfrae suffers at the hands of Henchard. But it is a general feeling that had

Farfrae, the foreigner, never come to Casterbridge, Henchard would have suffered less. But Farfrae may be held responsible for much that arouses the worst aspects of Henchard's nature. It is true that Henchard was being criticized for selling poor flour even at the moment Farfrae entered Casterbridge, but it is also true that Henchard had flourished for twenty years despite his characters.

Leucetta is the third factor. She too has arrived from distant parts. She too has a foreign name which she changes to Templeman when she comes to stay Casterbridge. Henchard has met her while from home. Here again, we find the picture of the primitive who gets into trouble when not in his home territory.

Thus, it is apparent, that much of Henchard's troubles arise out of his association with people who come into his life from outside. In fact, this is the story of a maladjustment between, the old and the new. These 'new' characters serve as a collective symbol of the new age encroaching on the traditional basis of rural life.