

Q6. From a reading of Hardy's short stories, discuss how Hardy brings out the aspects of Victorian society in 'The Withered Arm' and 'The Son's Veto'.

A6. Thomas Hardy lived during the Victorian period and he lived from 1840-1928. He was a famous novelist and poet but his points were not liked by the people in the year of 1840. Thomas Hardy was known as a Novelist and his stories crossed the modern and Victorian age. Thomas Hardy also lived in the middle class family and was born in Dorset a tiny village in the south west of England. Also, he used the locality of Dorset in his stories. He was the person who felt men were bond servants of chance and that they played an important role on our lives. In both the short stories, 'The Withered Arm' and 'The Son's Veto', he used a lot of description which was one of the other reasons why he was so popular. This is because his innate gift of description expressed someone or something in the deepest form which could actually help the reader picture the person or something clearly.

First of all in both the short stories, 'The Withered Arm' and 'The Son's Veto' we see clearly that marriages could only happen between two people of the same class and that it could only be between social equals and this is one of the aspects that society judged a person on. Also, in both the short stories written by Thomas Hardy the level of your class in society determined the respect one would get. In 'Withered Arm', the case was that Farmer Lodge was of a lower class, and when he came up in his class in society, he married Gertrude who too was of a high class and was a lady. Here, Farmer Lodge stepped out of his original class and wanted to be exactly look a person of a higher class which is why he left Rhoda Brook who was of the lower class, although she had given birth to a son, and so he decided to start his life as a gentleman. He had also married Gertrude because she was so beautiful, and this was another thing society looked on – the appearance of a person. This is why in the beginning Rhoda Brook sends her son to spy on Farmer Lodge's newly wedded wife which we soon come to recognise as Gertrude. Rhoda Brook thus this because she wants to know if the woman Farmer Lodge has married is good looking and well off which she presumed as the sole reason for leaving her. This is mainly because society's nature was that they graded people for the way they looked, and accordingly, respect would be given to that the person. This can be proven by the quote, 'And if she seems like a woman who has ever worked for a living, or one that has been always well of, and has never done anything, and shows marks of the lady on her, as I expect she do.' This quote is about Rhoda Brook who is keen to know if Farmer Lodge has left her for the class distinction. Also in the Victorian society, men married woman who were extremely young which is what Farmer Lodge did exactly.

In 'The Son's Veto', we see almost the same picture but based on the same idea of class distinction. Here, we see Sophy, a parlour maid who is in love with Sam, who is a gardener, and is of the lower class just like Sophy is. Sadly, Sophy, plays the hard to get behaviour which, is so common to Victorian behaviour, and when Sam proposes she stalls, and soon has a fight with him. Then comes along Reverend Twycott, who then notices Sophy as a 'kitten-like flexuous, tender creature', and then after a series of events soon proposes to Sophy, and since she had fought with Sam, he was out of her mind, and so she agrees. The sad thing was that she did not truly love him, but she had immense respect and awe for him, 'which almost amounted to veneration'. As the story unfolds, Hardy soon reveals that her trying to step out of her class was a big mistake as she was

left unhappy with her life. Reverend Twycott on the other hand, knew that my marrying Sophy, he basically 'committed social suicide' as society would totally not accept the marriage between to not social equals who were not of the same class. The quote to prove this is 'there was a marriage-service at the communion rails, which hardly a soul knew of.' Though this quote it is quite evident that no marriage guests were invited for the sole reason that society would not accept the idea of them being together, and would reject them which would soon make them outcasts. Also, this was because society would not understand a bit, as they always seemed to put no reason before what seemed like logic to them. In 'The Withered Arm', Farmer Lodge could not marry Rhoda Brook even if he wanted to as he too would be made an outcast in the eyes of society as he was no more a lower class just as Rhoda Brook was, but he was of the higher class and could only be with someone of the same class as he was. The irony in both of these stories is that in 'The Withered Arm', Farmer Lodge truly loved Rhoda Brook, but could not marry her as society did not accept it and so he did not try fighting for their love. Whereas in 'The Son's Veto', Sophy loved Sam very much and could have married him, but because of the fight between the two of them she chose respect for Reverend Twycott, over the love that Sam was offering her. Farmer Lodge in fact, was much lower in class than Reverend Twycott was, and also, Rhoda Brook, Sophy and Sam were of the same class.

Sophy in choosing Reverend Twycott as her husband who was of the higher class, over Sam who was of the same class as she was, made a terrible mistake as she soon learns that moving out of your class only brought unhappiness. This is because Sophy was never really happy because when Reverend Twycott died, she was left lonely, and she did not find the joy she had with Sam. This was because with Sam she could afford to be herself, that was a person of a lower class, whereas now in the eyes of society and her husband she had to pretend to be a 'lady' which was the artificial her. This can be shown by the quote, 'Sophy the woman was as charming a partner could possess, though Sophy the lady deficiencies.' When analysing this quote, it makes a whole lot of sense as the real her that was a person of lower class, was a 'woman' who was 'as charming a partner could possess' that was she was a real nice person but in being a 'lady' she had her 'deficiencies', that was that although she tried to act like a lady, she never was a perfect one, as she was trying to be something she was not – a 'lady'. We can also see how Hardy steps up Sophy from 'woman' that was so pure and gentle, to a 'lady' that wasn't perfect which in society's eyes was extremely bad. Thus by being with Sam, she could afford to be herself, whereas in the eyes of society she had to be a 'lady'. Also we can see this through two more quotes: 'and wither she would have gone back- O how gladly! – even to work in the fields.' Through this quote it is quite evident that when she looks on her life in the past and what is now, she does not even mind a single bit and she would be glad to work in the fields, just to get back to the real person she was. The second quote to prove that moving out of one's class rarely brought happiness and satisfaction is, 'She had occasionally thought of him, and wondered if life in a cottage with him would not have been a happier lot than the life she had accepted.' Through this quote, it is quite evident that she feels a great sense of regret as there is great probability that she would have been better off with Sam and a happy life. In way her case is quite understandable as she might not have been accepted by many other people because of the class she was in, and this isolation can be seen in the beginning of the story when Hardy talks of the effort she put in every day to set her hair. This can be better understood by

the quote, 'One could not understand such weavings and coilings being wrought to last intact for a year, or even a calendar month but that they should be all demolished regularly at bedtime, after a single day of permanence, seemed a reckless waste of successful fabrication.' Through this quote we can understand that she put in a great effort to design her hair, and Hardy makes it seem like a great work of art which only lasted till the end of the day. The reason why she did this can be seen through the quote, 'She had no maid, and it was the only accomplishment she could boast of.' From this we can see that she was not somebody great and she was of the lower class, and since she was not famous or anything, she wanted to be at least good at something, which explains why she 'braided and twisted' her hair so that she would be recognised for at least something.

In addition to this, Sophy hardly had any friends and she was always made ware of her deficiencies either by herself, or by her son who was ashamed and felt embarrassed of the fact that his mother was not a 'lady'. About Sophy not having that many friends, that was because she was not in the real class she belonged to, and because she was not herself. This can be shown through the quote, 'Sophy's mileu being a suburb of minor tradesmen and under clerks, and her almost only companions the two servants of her own house'. From this quote it is quite visible that she hardly interacted with anyone, and she was more of a quite and silent person being a 'lady', and her stepping out of class had caused her be a person who kept contemplating on how her life might have been with Sam Hobson, the man she loved very much. Her son on the other hand was the result of the nature of society and by this, I mean that her son was a real snob who was very selfish and not concerned about anyone else but himself and he did not help his mother a bit as he made her aware of her deficiencies as a 'lady', and did not love her a inch compared to the affection Sophy felt for her son, Randolph. This can be seen by two quotes, 'Has, dear mother – not have!' This quote is when Sophy uses improper English and when Randolph corrects her, he shouts at her, which is extremely rude, and Sophy does not say anything. Thus, we can see that Sophy was always aware that her main deficiency was in her use of language. The second quote is, 'his mother, a child of nature herself, had loved in him; he was reducing their compass to a population of a few thousand wealthy and titled people.' From this quote one can clearly understand that the love Sophy had for Randolph, her son, was pure, and she loved him with all her heart but he did not care or want to open his heart to her. Also it is evident that as Randolph grew up, he went farther away from his mother, and took the company of famous people as he wanted to establish himself as a real gentleman, and the cause of this was the nature of society that dictated that one would only be recognised for his appearance, class and his behaviour. The company of Randolph is so much in contrast to Sophy's, as she only had the company of 'two servants.' Thus, it is quite understandable that the sophistication society was looking for ended with Randolph becoming snobbish.

This also brings to thought that if Farmer Lodge married Rhoda Brook, Rhoda would have been more or less in the same position as Sophy was, but the difference is that Rhoda is a much stronger character than Sophy is. This can be see through the way she handled Farmer Lodge's absence for Gertrude, and this is because she hid not cry or grieve over his departure, although she was quiet when milking the cows and she had a dream of Gertrude. Also, although she hated Gertrude for stealing Farmer Lodge she did not fail to accept Gertrude for her good qualities when she gave her son a pair of boots to

wear and made adjustments with her feelings to be herself. Sophy on the other hand is extremely indecisive, as she does not know if she will stay in the Vicarage after the death of the reverend's first wife. Also, when Sam talks to Sophy about settling down together after the death of the reverend she finds it so hard to first of all bring up the subject to her son, and when he fusses so much she finds it hard to show him who is the real one with authority and she fails in putting her needs first before her spoiled sons'. She does not seem to understand that her son is getting everything his way, and it is time for her to start to get a few things in her direction.

Also society's nature was that appearance was always recognised and the person was respected for the way he or she looked. We see that older men always married younger women and this was common, and this can be seen in 'The Withered Arm', when Farmer Lodge marries Gertrude, who is extremely young. This can be proven through the quote, 'Years younger than he they say'. This is the comment one of the workers at the dairy make as they talk and gossip about Farmer Lodge's newly wedded wife. We can see the importance of appearance and this can be seen when Gertrude gets her withered arm, and when she soon feels that she would not have bothered about her arm so much had she not got a notion that she was being loved less by her husband. This can be further proved by the quote, 'Men think so much of personal appearance'. Through this quote we can understand that she is dejected as her husband doesn't seem to be giving her the same attention as before. This all because society taught men to be aware of appearance and this certainly had its effect on Gertrude. She becomes sad and starts to crave for her husband's love and this can be seen by the quote, 'and was secretly hoping against hope to win back his heart again by regaining at least some at least some of her personal beauty.' This shows the real nature of society as men only married women of good appearance and not for the real reason – love for one another. We also see her sadness in the nature of society as their marriage was not based on love, but on things like appearance and class distinction. This can be seen in the short story, 'The Withered Arm', where Gertrude feels distressed by the fact that Farmer Lodge is neglecting her because of her left arm which was withered, and this is why she says, 'Is years of marriage, and only a few months of love.' Here it is very evident that she is upset totally by the fact that she is being ignored, and loved less and the only conclusion to this is that, if society did not have men marry women based on their appearance, then the marriage would be real as the men would accept the women for who they were, and marry them even if they were not that good looking.

Thus, it is quite obvious that marriage in Victorian times was not really based on love, and that love was totally not the condition or criteria but it was based on minor things like appearance and class distinction in society. This is clear as Farmer Lodge's marriage to Gertrude was not based on love, but her appearance and her position in society and so when her arm became withered, he neglected, ignored and gave her less attention and love compared to the time when her beauty was complete. As in 'The Son's Veto', Sophy's marriage to Reverend Twycott was also not based on the condition or criteria of love but because she was full of awe and respect for him which amounted to 'almost veneration'. Thus, both marriages in 'The Withered Arm' and 'The Son's Veto' were marriages of convenience and not for love for one another. For the women they were supposed to be frail, gentle, beautiful, and most of all they were supposed to be very young.

We also see the life style of the lower class, in 'The Withered Arm', where Rhoda Brook and the other milk men and women work at the dairy. We can see the simple life the lower class were subjected to and the rough work the lower class were faced with, and this can be seen in the two quotes, 'It was an eighty – cow dairy, and the troop of milkers, regular and supplementary, were all at work', 'The hour was six in the evening, and three – fourths of the large, red rectangular animals having been finished off'. From these quotes we can see the immense work these lower class people were faced with, and the fact that it was an 'eighty – cow dairy', certainly proves that they had a lot of work to do and that there was a lot of milking to be done. This point can be proved by the quote, 'The hour was six in the evening, and three – fourths of the large, red rectangular animals having been finished off'. Also, we can see that the class a person belonged to, could be notified by the mode of transport they used. This can be seen in 'The Withered Arm' when Farmer Lodge uses the cart horse to bring his newly wedded wife, Gertrude, home. By using the cart- horse, as his method of transport, he shows clearly that he is of the high class society and by doing this, he not only is recognised for his position but he is also respected for having a wife who is extremely young and good looking. The fact that Farmer Lodge taking a ride in a cart horse was a big thing can be clearly understood by the description of the horse: 'a handsome new gig, with a lemon coloured body and red wheels.' From this quote it is clearly understood how to understand the class a person was in.

Another major aspect of society was their superstitions, and the effects they had on people's character. Superstition is first introduced in 'The Withered Arm', through the dream Rhoda Brook has, and how society made certain people victim of their superstition can be seen in Rhoda Brook, as she was made a victim of society's beliefs. This can be proven by the quote, 'She knew that she had been slyly called a witch since her fall'. This quote is when Rhoda Brook begins to wonder if she did have powers after she had a dream of Gertrude where she hurts her and when she finds out that Gertrude really is, she begins to question. Here, we see society's unfairness in judging people wrongly, and making them doubt themselves about who they were. The impact of society on people can be seen when Gertrude finds out that her husband likes her less because of her withered arm, and because of that, she longs and craves for it, and tries many cures and she turns into a person who is superstitious as she is willing to believe any cure just to get her husband's attention and love back once more. Effect of society and its nature can be seen in 'The Son's Veto', where Sophy's son Randolph, has turned into an entirely different person as he wants to be a pure gentleman, and so he takes the company of famous people, so as to make himself recognised in society and not caring a little about the fact that his mother is all alone. His change in character can be seen in the quote, 'in her son's eyes – a mother whose mistakes and origin it was his painful lot as a gentleman to blush for.' From this quote, it is clear that Sophy's son Randolph, felt that his mother's deficiency in use of language and being a 'lady' was a flaw in society and he felt ashamed of having a mother who was not a part of society and he felt that this flaw of hers, degraded him in society. Also the dress worn by people indicated their class in society and this can be seen in both short stories. In 'The Withered Arm', we see Farmer Lodge's clothes as 'his great golden seals hung like a lord's;' while Gertrude wore 'a white bonnet and a silver coloured gown.' From these quotes, one can understand that the way they dressed, was with so much sophistication and this clearly showed their

position in society.’ In ‘The Son’s Veto’, we see how the clothes worn displayed one’s position in society. This can be seen by the quote, ‘the shape of whose hat and jacket implied that he belonged to a well – known public school. From this quote it is understood that from the clothes Randolph wore, he was acknowledged as a boy who was of the high class and so it could be easily understood that he ‘belonged’ to one of the most expensive and famous.

Unfairness in society can be seen in the ‘Withered Arm’, when people are said to be hung for minor things like, ‘horse stealing, arson, and burglary’, and sometimes not for the genuine reason of committing a crime, but so that an example would be set for society so as to not to make the same mistake. This can be proven by the quote, ‘they are obliged to make an example of him, there having been so much destruction of property that way lately.’ The unjust nature of society is again seen in ‘The Withered Arm’, when Gertrude finds it hard to go to jail so that she could touch the back of the neck of a person hanged because women were not allowed in unless they had the company of a man and this shows the biased nature of society. This can be seen by the quote, ‘but what means she should adopt for obtaining admission to the jail.’

Thus, all I can finally say is that both stories were tragic in their own way, all because a few characters went a little higher in society. In ‘The Withered Arm’, Farmer Lodge went higher in society and left his original wife, Rhoda Brook whom he had a son with, and married Gertrude who died trying to get her arm healed as Farmer Lodge married her because of her appearance and so he was left with neither Gertrude or Rhoda Brook. In ‘The Son’s Veto’ Sophy married Reverend Twycott because she had respect for him and not because she loved him, although she did really love ‘Sam Hobson’, and when the Reverend died, she was left alone and longed for Sam’s love but it did not happen because she was indecisive, and as she could not tell her son that she had to move on with her life whether or not he liked it.

