

**A WOMAN STANDS UP, SHE STANDS FOR ALL: TENACITY AND ASTUTENESS OF ROYAL WOMAN IN HILARY MANTEL'S TUDOR ENGLAND**

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“Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women”- Maya Angelou

Advancement of women becomes true when she establishes her state in the society as an independent intellectual woman. The nucleus of all concepts and ideas about women is that she must be an independent being to decide about her life and to sustain it. The contemporary writers reclaim the lives of remarkable women, who are very progressive and self-determination and active participants in the social life of the past. The genre, historical fiction, is a platform to recreate such persons, who create their own destiny. Hilary Mantel's historical novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* represent the lifestyle, attitude and perceptions of Tudor England. It portrays not only the rise and fall of Thomas Cromwell, the chief minister to the king Henry VIII but also depicts the life and muddle of the royal women like Catherine Morgan, Anne Boyle, and Jane during the Tudor era. This paper probes into the struggles and hardships they face to ascertain their presence in public life due to socialisation, so called socialisation created by the patriarchal society.

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socialisation, self-determination, sphere

Hilary Mantel, through her historic fictional narratives, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, tries to recreate the glorious Tudor England. It is a narrative that depicts the rise of Thomas Cromwell, the son of Putney blacksmith to the principal adviser to King Henry VIII. She has been lauded with the Booker Prize for both her historical fictional narratives and became the international bestseller. Besides, Hilary Mantel is the first woman writer to produce a triptych in literature. In her novels she represents the stifling Tudor period from a new perspective, especially from a woman's point of view, where women have no power to act or move, especially the royal women. John Mullan, the reviewer, *The Guardian*, states that mantel's women characters “ have no escape from the power exerted over them.”

Sixteenth century was a period of great reformation in England. Henry VIII, the Tudor king, proclaimed himself as the head of The Church of England by breaking away from the sovereignty and supremacy of the Pope. This decision of Henry VIII sows the seed for European reformation. The Tudor period is a very significant period in the history of England due to two reasons. Firstly it is a period which brought a great change in the power of the king. Secondly, it was a period of remarkable growth in trade and commerce in England. As a result, England has become very powerful. However, this advancement is not reflected in the depiction of women and the position of women in the society does not improve. On the other hand, the position of women was very pathetic and handling of women in Tudor England was highly appalling. In fact, there is no proper healthcare facility for women. Due to this most of the women died during childbirth and the neonatal mortality also remains very high. Moreover, the royal women are not an exception to this. For example, Queen Elizabeth of York too dies in childbirth. Catherine too had several miscarriages and three of children died immediately after birth.

Hilary Mantel traces the attitude and cruelty of the patriarchal society to this appalling situation as “...We shouldn't mourn, he (Brother Martin) says, if our wife or daughter dies in childbirth – she's only doing what God made her for.” (WH 124). Alison Plowden in *Tudor Women: Queens & Commoners* details the life of Tudor women. She outlines the plight of women in the very first chapter as

“... sixteenth century England was still very much a man’s world. With no voice in parliament women could play no part in making or changing the law and, indeed, common law barely recognized their existence, except as an appendage of husband or father”(5).

In Tudor England there existed a separate sphere for women called the private sphere and separate sphere public sphere, exclusively for men, a sphere of power and reason. James Daybell, a senior lecturer in the University of Plymouth, who does a comprehensive study of women’s letters during the early period, in *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* is highly against the concept of separate sphere for men and women. Because, in spite of the patriarchal society of the Tutor era’s restriction of women to the private sphere in order to repudiate the public space. Because the letters written during the Tutor era are proof to his claim. This stands as a testimony to the fact that the patriarchal society failed to repudiate women from public space. The intelligent and independent women succeed to build alliances between the spheres and make the distinction mere shadow. . For example, Lady Margaret Beaufort has steered the accession of Tutor Henry VII and put an end to the dispute between Yorks and Lancastrians.

Hilary Mantel in her historical novel details the attitude of the Tudor age where the primary duty of the queen is to bear children and that too sons. The royal women are restricted to their biological role nullifying the capacity of their predecessors Lady Margaret Beaufort. Even though there is no law which prevents women from ascending the throne, the hypocritical patriarchal society maps out male-heir as the right person to ascend the throne. This led King Henry VIII to eventually marry six women in pursuit of a male heir. Janet Hardy-Gould, the author of *Henry VIII and his Six Wives* in his introduction to the book states:

There were six of them – three Katherines, two Annes, and a Jane. One of them was the King’s wife for twenty-four years, another for only a year and a half. One died, two were divorced, and two were beheaded. It was a dangerous, uncertain life. After the King’s death in 1547, his sixth wife finds a box of old letters – one from each of the first five wives. They are sad, angry, frightened letters. They tell the story of what it was like to be the wife of Henry VIII of England.

Socialism is an evil practice devised by the patriarchs to terminate women's intelligence and sensibility. Mary Wollstonecraft considers this as a vicious practice of the society. Whereas the liberals assess reason, rationality and critical thinking as a divine thing which brings people closer to the creator. It is the basic ontological capacity of human beings and it remains the same for all. Tudor women with the same ontological capacity explicit their expertise in politics to manifest, sphere doesn’t matter, what matters is quality and ethics

*Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* sketches the intelligence and the capacities of royal women and their struggle to attain honour and position in their lives. First in that list is Catherine of Aragon, the first wife of Henry VIII is a dynamic and stubborn woman, who devises all plans to secure her honour and position as king’s wife, the queen and secure the rights for her daughter Mary. Mantel presents Catherine as a quick-witted person, when Cardinal Campeggio beseech her to oblige to King’s will and go to convent “... she says Sweetly, she will become a nun: if the king becomes a monk” (WH 144).

Catherine’s dynamic personality is not only registered by mantel but also in historical representations. History is in all praise for her fiery and vigorous personality during misfortunes. Mantel presents her as a woman admired by Thomas Cromwell. “He, Cromwell, admires Katherine: he likes to see her moving about the royal palaces, as wide as she is high, stitched into gowns so bristling with gemstones that they look as if they are designed less for beauty than to withstand blows from a sword.”(WH 84) He even praises her tenacity in fighting with the king’s persistence to marry Anne.

You can hear what Katherine says. That wreck of a body, held together by lacing and stays, encloses a voice that you can hear as far as Calais: it resounds from here to Paris, from here to Madrid, to Rome. She is standing on her status, she is standing on her rights; the windows are rattled, from here to

Constantinople. What a woman she is, Thomas Cromwell remarks in Spanish: to no one in particular. (WH 89)

The contemporary writers who sought to create a new society free from socialisation and disparity in gender advocates progressive thinking among their characters, who would be self-determining, independent, sexually liberated and judicious. Mantel is a forerunner in this and she presents the royal woman of Tudor period from the perspective of Cromwell, who rises to a great position in the glamorous Tudor court out of his sense of reasoning analytical skill. The rationale behind this perspective is to build credibility among the readers about the intelligence and political power of women. Cromwell was surprised to find the reply of Catherine to king when she was asked to give up the ropes of child Mary he feels that it is good that Catherine is a woman if she were a man she would have eclipsed all great deeds of prehistoric heroes. (WH 481)

Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry VIII is known for her political shrewdness and straight forwardness. She remains a mystery in the eyes of historians. Mantel represents her as a person with high aspiration and determination. She represents her as “a calculating being, with a cold slick brain at work behind her hungry black eyes” (WH350). she has all praise for her stubbornness and strategy. In *Bring Up Bodies* Cromwell mentions about his perception for Anne to his nephew as, “He has always rated Anne highly as a strategist. He has never believed in her as a passionate, spontaneous woman. Everything she does is calculated, like everything he does. He notes, as he has these many years, the careful deployment of her flashing eyes. He wonders what it would take to make her panic” (BUTB113).

.In society unequal relationships and positions for women are socially, ideologically and culturally constructed. Virginia Woolf in her *A room's One's Own* assures that women are equally powerful and the patriarchal society prevents women from reaching great heights of power through the socially fabricated ideological structure. Hilary Mantel by portraying Cromwell and Anne as equally powerful breaks all ideological structure that strangled them. Therefore, Mantel through her works portrays at one hand the persecution of women at the same time she emphasizes the point that these hardships and struggles made them very strong to stand for themselves. She would like to emphasize the point that to be powerful, what matters is your intelligence and reason not gender.

Mantel presents the intelligence of woman in sarcastic and subtle way as in *Bring Up Bodies* she states about Anne as “He has made her queen, she has made him minister; but they are uneasy now, each of them vigilant, watching each other for some slip that will betray real feeling, and so give advantage to the one or the other: as if only dissimulation will make them safe” (IBUTB 29-30). Acknowledgement and recognition is not instant in society. Even though Anne was never accepted in the society as a powerful woman in no way says that she will not be recognised and looked up to.

Mantel very strongly believes that self-determination in women makes them empowered. She highlights the self-determination of Tudor women in her works. The society that makes use of all its opportunities to put her down to denigrate her appreciates them in the later part of the history for their determination and commitment in public life. Even so, Mantel pictures Anne as a manipulative and cunning woman, who does anything to attain her desire. The rationale behind such representation is to exhibit the intelligence and astuteness of Tudor. These are the qualities that stand apart in the empowerment of women in a patriarchal society. The society that used substandard ways to address her like the whore, witch, concubine etc.. admired and glorified the rule of Queen Elizabeth, the daughter of Anne Boylen. Thus when a woman stands up against the odds and struggles she stands for the entire woman of the present and future.

Thus it can be assumed that Hilary Mantel gives new life, a kind of rejuvenation to Tudor woman in her historical novels. She narrates and emphasizes the intelligence of women right from the Tudor period to the present, to establish herself in the society. Hence, Tudor England is not only a period of great kings but also a period known for strong and self-determinant and committed women. When Tudor women succeed in public life out of their appalling society it paves the way for women to cope

with the struggles in life to establish themselves in their own world. To add up, she has resurrected the Tutor woman in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*.

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