

## ANALYSIS OF TRAGIC CONDITION OF THE PROTAGONIST IN THOMAS HARDY'S 'TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES'

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### Abstract

'Tess of The D'Urbervilles' is a tragedy written by Thomas Hardy. This paper is an attempt to analyze the causes and factors responsible for the tragic condition of Tess. Tess is the only character in the play that suffers without her fault. This paper is also an attempt to study whether Tess was victim of human cruelty or fate. Women always have been victim of society where men dominated women. Women have been dealt as one of the sources to fulfill hunger of pleasure for men. Man has no mercy for woman. Tess suffers right from the beginning of the play till end. She became puppet of circumstances and male harassment. Tess has to go through mental, physical and psychological suffering throughout her life which in some or the other way become symbolic of a women's destiny in the merciless world where the stronger one crushes the weaker.

**Key words:** Tragedy, feminism, society, victim, seduce, suffer

### Introduction:

Thomas Hardy is one of very well known writers of Wessex novels of Victorian era. 'Tess of The D'Urbervilles' is Hardy's one of the greatest novels that depicts anguish of a woman against modern society and modern industrialization which were the major reasons for the tragic condition of Tess. This paper is an attempt to analyze Tess from the perspective of feminism to get the attention of the reader towards excessive exploitation of women by the male dominated society due to industrial civilization, and this paper also aims to encourage women to fight against harassments caused by men against them. In the novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Hardy introduces Tess as a beautiful young girl who is pure from heart. She was first introduced as a dancer in the 'Club-Walking' of the village in novel. Among the band of beautiful young girls, she was the most beautiful in her own natural way.

"She was a fine and handsome girl---not handsomer than some others, possibly---but her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to color and shape. She wore a red ribbon in her hair, and was the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment."<sup>(1)</sup>

She has childish heart into her mature female body which makes her more beautiful. It shows that she was pure from heart and body.

**Social Background:** The novel ‘Tess of the D’Urbervilles’ was written in late 19th century when Victorian society entered into the capitalist industrial civilization. In this time concept and system of marriage restrained in people. Introduction of machine, made small land owner and farmers lose their land for the survival. They were reduced to the employees under the capitalist mode of production.

Professor Chen Jia gives the following comments on the description of Flintcomb-Ash farm:

“The striking scene of capitalist exploitation and oppression on the Flintcomb-Ash farm is one of the highlights in the novel, for here as rarely elsewhere in English fiction do we witness a vivid picture of how women labors were especially heavily exploited, with their lower wages but not lighter work, how they were insulted as well as maltreated with harsh words and orders, how they had to work under the most terrible condition of weather and long hours until all except the very staunchest of them collapsed with over-fatigue. In this respect Tess of the D’Urbervilles is almost unique among the English novels of critical realism in the latter part of the 19th century, in which such vivid scenes are given of the central character as a peasant worker under capitalist exploitation and oppression”.<sup>(2)</sup>

Tragedy of Tess is outcome of this change in social life due to the industrialization. She became victim of social oppression. Capitalist exploitation became one of the major factors for the tragedy of Tess.

### **Customary Morality:**

People of Marlot represent the customary morality. Tess is seduced by Alec and gave birth to a child. She became the central matter of gossip in Marlot. She very deeply felt guilty and closed herself in room for days and she only came out in night only. Customary morality also reflected through Angle’s brothers Felix and Cuthbart because they neither have purity of soul nor originality of thought. They disapprove Tess because of her low social status which they think lowers them in the eyes of the world. The following paragraph presents a clear description of them;

“After breakfast, he walk with his two brothers, non-evangelized, well-educated, hall-marked young men ,correct to their remotest fiber; such unimpeachable models as are turned out yearly by the lathe of a systematic tuition. They were both somewhat short-sighted, and when it was a custom to wear single eyeglass and string they wore a single eyeglass and string; when...they wore ...; when he was decried in favor of Velasquez, they sedulously followed suit without any personal objection”.<sup>(3)</sup>

### **Religious Ethics;**

Religion is a typical form of social conventional and laws. “Throughout Tess, Hardy deprecates religious. He thinks that it is either a lifeless affair, as with the Clare family; or a matter of fanaticism, as with the text painter or those who are followers of Alec later in the book”.<sup>(4)</sup>

There is contradiction in the belief system for religion. Tess believes in God and goes to church regularly but after her seduction by Alec, she had doubt on her belief. Tess neither gets forgiveness nor compassion, but the endless accusation after returned home. “...the people...and at last observing her they whispered to each other”.<sup>(5)</sup>

When she gave birth to an innocent child she could not give religious funeral to dead child. Tess's child funeral was rejected and that broke her belief and she promised to not to come to church.

### **Capitalist Law**

Tess also became a victim of the Capitalist laws. The Capitalist of that time were very rigid for the marriage and divorce. They had religious ethics and they made it orthodoxy. Marriage was not choice but compulsion that time and neither Christianity nor the law allowed divorce.

The other reason that causes Tess' tragedy is the cruelty of law. At the end of the story, Angel Clare, who is remorseful for his mercilessness, comes back, but to find the cruel reality. And his arrival makes Tess even more desperate. After Angel leaves, she stabs Alec in the heart and kills him. Finally, she is arrested and hanged to death. Thus, the author writes sarcastically: “...Justice was done, and the president of the immortals has ended his sport with Tess”.<sup>(6)</sup>

This concept of capitalist law became responsible for the suffering of Tess because she was considered guilty of having child without marriage.

### **Fatalism**

Fate plays its own role in human life and nobody can escape from it. Man is product of his own destiny whatever deeds he or she performs but its result is affected by fate. Hardy too was fatalist and this fatalism he expressed through the character of Tess. There are many incidences and coincidences that happened due to fate. Even the plot of the novel Tess of The D'Urbervilles is promoted by the events of fate. It is very much clear through the course of Tess' life and its strives that she is the victim of the events which happens against her for no reasons and without any flaw of her; it's just like that someone is walking on road and got hit by a vehicle which was driven by a drunken driver and the person become wounded or died without any fault of him.

### **Nature and Environment**

Hardy used the fatalism through nature, nature of the world and nature of people. Hardy described the natural background keenly and genuinely so that reader can understand nature

scenery. The most important is that landscape descriptive is closely coherent with Tess' tragic fate. Hardy's painter techniques such as color, ray and tone in the landscape describe to create tragic atmosphere of the character.

There are several places in which Tess lives and which have great influence on Tess. The first place is the Vale of Blakemore, where Tess was born and brought up. She had been living in this place before 16 years old, leading a quiet and happy life. The beautiful vale rears a beautiful girl. We are told that "Tess, with her sensuousness, is an embodiment of the principle in nature of irresistible sexual attraction. Her flower-red mouth, her pretty face, her fine figure, and her unselfconscious affinity with all that is natural suggest how nature is a force in her character and determinant of her fate" (7)

Description of the nature does not only provide physical background but changes with season shows the change in Tess' fate and turning point in Tess's life.

### **Sense of responsibilities of Tess**

Hardy presented Tess as a modern woman by old moral. In the eyes of the world, "she is a sinner, a fallen woman, the mistress of a dependent by other, and finally is a murderer." (8) Hardy considers her as the greatest beauty of the nature and pure person. Her strong sense of responsibility became the reason for her tragedy. She loves her brothers and sister and wanted to support them. This desire gives her endless suffering. Her parents persuaded her to visit the famous family but initially she rejected, later her sense of responsibility made her to visit D'Urbervilles and this sense of responsibility attract her towards Alec, it was the beginning of her tragic life. She met and falls in love with Angel. She chose not to hide her reality when she was ready for the proposal of marriage offered by Angel because she was under the impact of true love and purity of her heart. Before marriage we can clearly see the sufferings of Tess, "They were not aware..., and which somehow seemed wrong to these". (9) After breaking up with Angel and death of her father, her family was going through tremendous difficulties. Alec took the advantage of this condition of Tess and used as a chance to persuade her. She made compromises for her mother, brother and sister. This sense of responsibility made her life more tragic. She was left with only choice to withdraw from her responsibility but she did not do that. Alec left her after deflowering her. She was restrained to bury her child by religious ritual. She bravely shouted: "I will never go to your church." She has a heroic quality of endurance, of "patience, that blending of moral courage with physical timidity". (10)

Tess simply got trapped by the fate and cruel people because of that she had to suffer throughout her life.

### **Conclusion**

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is the story of a woman - Tess who goes through endless sufferings till the end of her life. Society, fate, circumstances and male all conspired to create the tragic

condition in life of Tess. Tess was completely pure from her heart and soul without any malignancy still she had to go through with the utter suffering. Her suffering was cruelty of man and fate that made her lose the faith in life completely. She had a question in mind that she is suffering because she is a woman. Tess has no way to protect herself in the society where men are waiting to harass woman from every possible aspect whether it is physical, mental or sexual. Tess of the D'Urbervilles is the story of a woman who represents all the women who are helpless; to save themselves from the harassments in this male dominated society and looking towards nature to protect them. Tess became the victim of the fate, environment, incidences, and her sense of responsibilities and purity of heart.

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