

Feministic approach in the Tess of the d'Urbervilles

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the condition and portrayal of women in the Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles. Various kinds of feminism can be used to analyse the novel, however Marxism and Radical could be used prominently in this novel. The act of dehumanizing women by making her ideal and deviant seems to be an existing problem in the society. The contemporary era says that women are empowered and they are achieving the heights, but does this society really know a woman's life. So this research paper will discuss about how women's condition was projected during the Victorian era and the comparison with the contemporary era. The patriarchal values bent their aspects of rules according to their convenience and let women to act accordingly.

Key Terms: Ideal Woman, Deviant Woman, Patriarchal values, Dehumanisation, Contemporary condition.

Introduction:

Women's projection in the genre of novels seems to have two sides, the ideal and the deviant. It could be a male or a female writer, but the representation was similar to each other. Thomas Hardy was no more an exception onto the categorisation of writers in the writer. However, Hardy tried hard to present his women as pure and opposed the Victorian principles and rules laid on women. As Simone de Beauvoir says "One is not born woman, but she is made to be a Woman". According to this statement, a woman is made to cognize the patriarchal values that are laid in the society. To execute this ideology women are always suppressed. Thomas Hardy being the rebel of Victorian he expressed his feelings towards the atrocities happened in the society through his novels. In 1891, Thomas Hardy distributed Tess of the d'Urbervilles and stunned Victorian peruses with the novel's sexual topics and critical standpoint. Felice Charmond of The Woodlanders is a moderately minor character who is censured by society yet felt sorry for by Hardy, yet, Tess of the d'Urbervilles transforms this character type into a significant female champion. While Victorians would have considered Tess shameless and scandalous, Hardy paints her as an unadulterated and blameless survivor of egotistical men and highbrow society. All through the novel, Tess never loses the pursuers tenderness or appreciation, and her legal execution arrives at awful extents. This paper discusses about the portrayal of women and their condition in the contemporary era with comparison to Victorian women.

Background of the Study:

This study takes up a view where women are dehumanised by making them ideal and deviant which are binaries/opposites to each other. The black and white sides of women are seen as objectives but the grey side exists in everyone and that is unrecognised by the society. Views on women in the Victorian era and the contemporary era remains the same even though there have been many advanced changes around us. Therefore, this paper will discuss about the living factors of women in a patriarchal society. The sources used for this study is Thomas Hardy's book *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. This book by its nature tries to project the victim of the society Tess as the protagonist and helps to empower herself by the actions took by her all over the book. This research paper is written to understand the social and gender inequalities existing for women in the society. It has also tried to compare the situation of women in contemporary era and Victorian era.

Literature Review:

The writing of novels about women characters was a popular trend during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thomas Hardy followed that trend to advance women's rights, but the publication of his *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in 1891 shocked Victorian readers because of the novel's sexual themes and his pessimistic outlook. In order to explore the nature of Hardy's insight to women, one must examine problems which surround his representation of women in this novel, such as the popular image of women in the Victorian era and the pervasive cultural image of the 'angel in the house' contrasts with the image of the fallen woman and other less conventional images of woman.

Most feminist critics would agree that women are the central figures in Hardy's works. Pamela Jekel writes, "Hardy focuses primarily on the feminine" (1), and Rosalind Miles also observes that women form Hardy's "starting point" that they are "the summit of his highest endeavour, his initial inspiration and his ultimate goal" (44). Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is a study of the development of woman character in self, identity and

Independence. With the help of his young woman, Tess, Hardy exposes his strong plea for justice and charity. He exposes his feelings against the Victorian manners and morals when he defends Tess. He tends to idealize her on occasion, but he does not spoil the essentials. Tess remains a child of nature, good but not too good. In a sense, she is beyond good and evil because of her generosity, which is more real than the encompassing moralities. Tess can endure her sorrows; she can forgive the wrongs done to her, but not to forgive herself. As one-critic remarks: Mr. Hardy's heroines are characterised by a yielding to circumstance that is limited by the play of instinct. They are never quite bad. It seems, indeed, that this quality in them, which shuts them out from any high level of goodness, is precisely that which saves them from ever being very bad. They have an instinctive self-respect, an instinctive purity. (Ellis 117) Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is also a study a woman's personal experience, as portrayed in the context of the novel, and how Tess, the heroine, is presented as a fresh, innocent, naive country girl, who is ruled by emotion rather

than by intellect, placing her in accordance with Victorian expectations for women. We learn that Tess is a dutiful daughter, willing to sacrifice nearly anything for her family.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles and its Women

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), the Patriarchal forces consistently exploit Tess Durbeyfield, who is the youthful, gullible and compelling champion, both actually and intellectually. The women in the novel are portrayed as they are victims but they can also be live as survivors after an incident of adultery she became the victim unknowingly. However, according to the society she becomes the reason of all the problems the Victorian society saw her as a characterless and immoral woman even after the publishing of such kind of a novel. Thomas Hardy has tried in his way to change the society's perception. The most important element of today's scenario comparing to the Victorian age remains to be the same. The condition of women might have improved achieving heights but to degrade a woman her character is assassinated until today. She is always blamed for any mistakes of her life even though she is a victim of that situation the characters represented in the novels are existing in the real life situations.

Character of Tess as a Victim:

Tess is a distinctively important character in the Hardy's novels because she is unique enough to change the perceptions of the society. She is always in search of her identity. She was always torn between two worlds of her innocent youth and incipient womanhood. Hardy being the supporter of women and equality in the society, he portrays his women to replace the patriarchal ideologies existing in the Victorian era. Hardy, through all the events and characters presented in a way, tries to offer a vivid portrayal of women at the Victorian era in which women were attempting to redefine their place in society, trying to leave the domestic sphere to work and the realm of man. Women were fighting for equality in the Victorian era and Hardy was supporting this movement. Hardy's portrayal has tried to create a difference in the lives of women. He has tried to approach welfare measures for women through his novels. As Harvey Curtis Weber comments:

He maintained that it was unjust to make marriage the only career open to women and favoured women's suffrage at a time when suffragists were generally viewed as annoying oddities. He complained of the unrealistically sheltered education young girls received at teacher's [sic] college. ... He approved a woman's resolve to go by her own rather than her husband's name. (193)

The novels of Hardy is also a reflection of today's society women have equal rights in all forums of society. However, women in the aspect of motherhood and chastity she is still in the position of victim. She is always torn between her innocent childhood and pleasant womanhood like Tess women are always blamed of being victims.

Women and their independence:

Hardy presents Tess as a confused woman in her emotions, her duties and her sense of self-preservation. She is afraid to tell Alec that she holds no attraction to him, so that she remains docile to all that circumstance which brings her to crucial moments in the novel. Women in our society are torn between

their interest and the world's view on them. Their emotions are not completely expressed. Women are always scared of expressing because of the stigma attached to them as ideal women. Hardy's novel, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, is the story of a maiden who turned to a woman. It is a story of Tess's journey from youth to maturity, through time and earth, in search of self and a place in the earth.

It is about how this young innocent young woman tries to manage her affairs and establishes better human condition through work, through redemption from the past and its moral consciousness. Soon all innocence is lost and the inner evil, which exists within human, overpowers, and what we see is the image of woman oppressed by the patriarchal system. Though Hardy exposes the abuses in the system, he shows that women fall short of the qualities of their language and intelligence. Lovely Tess is simple, naive, and impulsive; she appears revolutionary and bizarre. In her, one may feel a sense of woman who is not capable of the duties required for establishing intellectual human communities. The novel also highlights how Hardy tries to advance women's rights by showing to what extent women were degraded in Victorian England. He sympathizes with his heroine through his presentation of analogous male and female characters.

Women and Passivity:

Hardy has brilliantly shown the innate nature of woman. Carl J. Weber, in his *Hardy of Wessex*, quotes Hardy himself:

"The majority of women are silent worthy enough in nature to satisfy any reasonable being" (94), but these women are in desire of equality in marriage, independence and opportunities for personal fulfilment. Hardy has a great interest of his women characters, whether they are elderly women or young women. The depth of his characterization suggests his great interest. He gives careful attention to clothing, jewels, cosmetics, and other small features, as well as in describing the emotional reactions. His knowledge apparently gained by observing many types of women around him. Irving Howe, in his studies of Hardy's novels, states that Hardy "liked women" and "could not imagine a universe without an active, even an intruding feminine principle" (108).

Chastity and its importance of women

"Virginity" has not a similar significance in the old Greek with the contemporary. The genuine meaning of virgin is an autonomous woman who will not comply with the male centric standards. In her content *Wilful Virgin*, the women's activist essayist, Frye (1992) says:

"Virgin" didn't initially mean a lady whose vagina was immaculate by any penis, yet a free, one not... bound to, not controlled by any man. It implied a female who is explicitly, and henceforth socially, her own individual. In any variant of male controlled society, there are no Virgins in this sense. (p. 133)

Chastity for a woman is considered as more than her life. When she losses it in the society she receives the utmost ill-treatment form the society and the family. Portrayed as being a meek and passive in the society women are blamed for beings the victims the ideology of womanhood is questioned.

Motherhood and womanhood is often questioned by the society to degrade a woman's place in the society. Tess loses her virginity in the two detects. As the aftereffect of a male's lust on her, Tess meets the truth of male controlled society in truly cruel way. In addition, the child of her who got pregnant after that assault of Alec is even not Christianised by an indecent and grimy result.

Worldview on deviant women:

Despite of the fact that Tess is assaulted, she presents an unpredictable conduct by never reprimanding herself for being assaulted and serving to the man centric principles for the remainder of her life to be cleansed from her "wrongdoing". She feels that what she encountered isn't her issue, and furthermore she isn't all around educated about sexuality to comprehend what Alec needed or did. She says: At no point ever – she could swear it from the lower part of her spirit – had she ever expected to foul up; yet these hard decisions had come. Whatever her transgressions, they were not sins of goal; however of accident, and for what reason would it be a good idea for her to have been rebuffed so determinedly? (Strong, 1871, p. 376)

This demeanour of Tess exhibits both (her additionally Hardy's) absence of conventional Christian precept. That is the reason Tess of the d'Urbervilles was protested such a huge amount by the Christian Victorians. Indeed, she is not at all around educated in Christian tenets. Her confidence can be much befittingly deciphered with the paganist regulations. In conclusion, toward the finish of the novel, at the time she is with Angel at Stonehenge prior to being captured, she recalls that Angel jokingly called her an agnostic when they were at the dairy. She feels her associated with the agnostic history and says, ""One of my mom's kin was a shepherd around here, presently I consider it. Likewise, you used to state at Talbothays that I was a pagan. So now, I am at home (Hardy, 1871, p. 416)

Conclusion:

Solid's tale, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, toward the end, seems, by all accounts, to be a triumph, an achievement of the depiction of female character, which is maybe considered as Hardy's most prominent commitment to English writing. Women are represented as the extraordinary figures in the entirety of his books. A few pundits, undoubtedly, express that Hardy's introduction of women characters is more powerful than his introductions of men. Disregarding the imperfections of his women characters, Hardy arrangements with them impartially which make them fascinating and conceivable. As Duffin comments, Hardy is "just about an expert in ladies" (235).

Tess of the d'Urbervilles speaks to a consistently expanding development of scorn and disappointment with the Victorian equation based perspectives on women. Tough, through the novel, remains against the individuals who meddle in the lives and wants of women in his time. Through the personality of Tess, he shows the estimation, overall, and the agony women suffer when society meddles with their ardent goals.

In making Tess, Hardy emphatically fights the brutal and uncalled for treatment of Victorian culture for women. He reprimands society for Tess' disappointment and misfortune, and she is liberated from any

fault. As Jane Thomas affirms, "Strong perceived women' physical, mental and passionate weakness to show and their ensuing capitulation in the substance of clearly overpowering prevailing burdens" (49). Tess is the image of a well established off base, a misfortune of women, of nature and of society. She gives the impression of being bigger than the destiny itself. She communicates Hardy's emotions towards women and, in one regard, towards society. His inclination is indicated when he shields Tess against the Victorian habits and ethics. He prevails in that the peruser is shocked at the unreasonable treatment of Tess by her public. Heavenly attendant Clare speaks to the cruel responses of society against her.

Hardy attempts to uncover the bad faith and shallowness of the public's convictions by contorting the Victorian perspective on great and insidiousness. He exhibits how society structures such pictures of women and uncovers, through his novel, his solid inspiration to change the Victorian culture's assessment of women. In the novel, Tess obviously battles between the normal job and the genuine self. While she endures enthusiastic problems, she appears to experience unforgiving conditions because of the social desires put upon her. Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles demonstrates his developing disappointment with his counterparts and his craving to improve the condition and status of women in his time.

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