THOMAS HARDY’S TESS OF THE D’URBERVILLES

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CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Social and Economic Context of the Novel

The nineteenth century was a period of comparative oppression when contrasted with today’s more liberal society, especially in terms of societal expectations of behaviour. This included gender roles, political viewpoints, opinions of established institutions, and the acceptance of societal hierarchy, amongst other things.

During the last phases of the nineteenth century, the times saw innovations in science and technology that changed society to a greater degree than ever before. ‘On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection’ written by Charles Darwin, published in 1859, had enormous cultural repercussions. The idea of humans descending from apes changed accepted views of religion and society and shocked the Victorians to think that their ancestors were animals.

Darwin's theory was made more passable by the formulation of a complementary theory called Social Darwinism. The proponents of this social philosophy argued that Darwin's ideas of "survival of the fittest" also applied to society and the existence of lower classes could be explained by their inferior intelligence and initiative in comparison to that of the upper classes.

Another striking feature relating to the social context of the novel was the stature of women in Victorian society. Hardy considered both the "Rights of Man" and the rights of women with equal sympathy. Women of the Victorian era were idealized as the helpmate of man, the keeper of the home, and the "weaker sex." The thought that Hardy subtitled his novel "A Pure Woman" infuriated some Victorian critics, because it struck on the face of all they held sacred.

Women were not only discriminated against by the moral code, but were also discriminated against by the legal code of the day. Until the 1880s married women were unable to hold property in their own name; and the wages of rural workers would go directly to the husband, even if he failed to provide anything for his family and the Victorian middle-class wife was admired upon her pedestal of moral superiority only so long as she remained there silently.

Thus the literature of the nineteenth century was also characterised by the emergence of the new philosophical and political ideologies, as well as the decline of absolute value systems mandated by religious belief systems. Rise of socialism also influenced the writings of the
European authors, particularly in light of the industrial revolution, which resulted in the emergence of a ‘proletariat’ viewed by observers as the victims of an unregulated marketplace. Marx and Engels’ ‘Communist Manifesto’ proposed that social justice could only be brought about by means of a revolution, although this was by no means the only proposed solution. Figures such as John Stuart Mill proposed liberalism as a solution – an enlightened bourgeoisie whose action would reform capitalism to achieve social justice whilst preserving the notion of ownership. Socialism was a pervasive force in the literature of the nineteenth century, and, towards its end, of growing relevance to the general populace. Towards the end of the century, individualism was an emergent force, and, as the feminist movement began to gain support, compositions of the period came to reflect that too.

1.2 Research Plan

The researcher through this project intends to comment on the principle of justice involved in the novel Tess of D’Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy. In order to reach the ultimate aim, the researcher would like to give a brief biography of the novelist i.e. Thomas Hardy and move on to give the plot summary of the novel. Further he would introduce the primary characters of the novel, after which he would comment on the principle of justice involved in the novel.

1.3 Research scheme

The research scheme undertaken by the researcher would comprises of doing a doctrinal study of the book available as an eBook on www.gutenberg.org. Further, the scheme would comprise of reading biographical articles on the novelist, Thomas Hardy.

1.4 Research Techniques for Data Collection

Research technique of analysis, critique, and review of the theories would be intended to be employed.

1.4 Research Methodology

The researcher has followed the doctrinal method of research throughout the project and the MLA system of formatting has been adopted by him.
CHAPTER – II

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 Biography of the Novelist

The author of the book Tess of the D’Urbervilles, Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840, in the village of Upper Bockhampton, located in Southwestern England. His father was a stone mason and a violinist. And his mother enjoyed reading and relating all the folk songs and legends of the region. At the age of eight, Hardy began to attend Julia Martin's school in Bockhampton. However, most of his education came from the books he found in Dorchester, the nearby town. He learned French, German, and Latin by teaching himself through these books. At sixteen, Hardy's father apprenticed his son to a local architect, John Hicks. Under Hicks' tutelage, Hardy learned much about architectural drawing and restoring old houses and churches. Hardy loved the apprenticeship because it allowed him to learn the histories of the houses and the families that lived there. In 1862, Hardy was sent to London to work with the architect Arthur Blomfield. During his five years in London, Hardy immersed himself in the cultural scene by visiting the museums and theaters and studying classic literature. He even began to write his own poetry. Although he did not stay in London, choosing to return to Dorchester as a church restorer, he took his newfound talent for writing to Dorchester as well. From 1867, Hardy wrote poetry and novels, though the first part of his career was devoted to the novel. At first he published anonymously, but when people became interested in his works, he began to use his own name. Like Dickens, Hardy's novels were published in serial forms in magazines that were popular in both England and America. His first popular novel was Under the Greenwood Tree, published in 1872. The next great novel, Far from the Madding Crowd (1874) was so popular that with the profits, Hardy was able to give up architecture and marry Emma Gifford. Other popular novels followed in quick succession: The Return of the Native (1878), The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), The Woodlanders (1887), Tess of the D’Urbervilles (1891), and Jude the Obscure (1895). Over the years, Hardy had divided his time between his home, Max Gate, in Dorchester and his lodgings in London. In his later years, he remained in Dorchester to focus completely on his poetry. In 1898, he saw his dream of becoming a poet realized with the publication of Wessex Poems. He then turned his attentions to an epic drama in verse, The Dynasts; it was finally completed in 1908. Before his death, he had written over 800 poems,
many of them published while he was in his eighties. After a long and highly successful life, Thomas Hardy died on January 11, 1928, at the age of 87. His ashes were buried in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey.

2.2 Plot Summary

Tess of the d'Urbervilles sets in motion with an insignificant incident: John Durbeyfield, a middle-aged plebian, is informed by a chance encounter on his way home one evening that he is the descendent of an “ancient and knightly family,” the d'Urbervilles. On learning this, John has a horse and carriage fetched for him so that he can arrive home in a manner more befitting his new station, and then goes out drinking, getting drunk enough that he is unable to get up in the middle of the night to make a delivery to a nearby town for the following morning. Tess, his oldest daughter, accompanied by her young brother Abraham, attempts to make the delivery instead; but she falls asleep on the way, and the family's horse, unguided, gets into a freaking accident and dies on the road.

Deprived of their transportation, the family faces hard times. Tess's parents hit on the idea of having her solicit the wealthy Mrs. d'Urbervilles, whom they incorrectly assume to be a relative, for help. Feeling responsible for their current situation, Tess agrees to go. When she arrives at the d'Urbervilles estate, she meets Mrs. d’Urbervilles son, Alec. He is attracted to her good looks and soon arranges for her to care for his mother's chickens. He comes to fetch her, and on the ride back makes it clear that his actions were not motivated by charity. Alec's unwanted attention continues throughout the next three months, culminating one night when he coaxes her to accept a ride home from a dance. He intentionally takes an alternate route, gets them lost, and eventually rapes her in her sleep. Hardy handles this issue with extreme circumspection, as is evident from the following excerpt: “Tess!” said d’Urbervilles.

A few weeks after this incident, Tess returns home. Falling into a depression, and pregnant, she remains in seclusion for the next year. She emerges in the following August to work in the fields, and soon thereafter her baby dies. After two more “silent reconstructive years” at home, Tess ventures forth again, this time to work as a dairymaid. At the dairy she attracts the attentions of Angel Clare, the youngest son of a vicar who has turned away from his father's faith and has settled on farming as a career. Angel is learning the ins and outs of the
dairy business at Talbothays. Over the course of the summer the two are drawn to each other, until Angel finally makes his feelings known to Tess. Soon he goes home to discuss the topic of marriage with his parents, who are resistant to the idea at first but finally give him a qualified “go-ahead.”

On his return to Talbothays, Angel wastes no time in proposing to Tess, but she, to his surprise, rejects him, and refuses to tell him why. Several such encounters follow, until her feelings for him overwhelm her shame, and she agrees to marry him. She continues to feel guilty about her past and, unable to bring herself to confide in Angel, she declines for weeks to commit to a wedding date. With the time for his departure from Talbothays fast approaching, Angel finally persuades her and a date of December 31 is set. Shortly before the day arrives, Tess again fails to confess her “stain” to him.

The wedding over, they drive on to an old mansion, which Angel informs Tess once belonged to her family. That night several things happen. First, the couple receives a parcel from Angel's parents containing several pieces of diamond jewelry willed to him by his godmother and to be presented to his wife. Soon thereafter their luggage arrives, along with bad news from Talbothays about three of Tess's fellow dairymaids, all of whom (unknowingly to Angel) were also in love with him. Finally, Angel, recalling Tess's earlier wish to make a confession, himself confesses to a relatively minor past indiscretion, an “eight-and-forty hours' dissipation with a stranger.” Thus fortified by her husband's apparent show of good faith and moved by the sudden fall of her three compatriots, Tess “enters on her story of her acquaintance with Alec d’Urbervilles.”

The consequences of her confession are disastrous as Angel is unable to accept her, claiming that, far beyond its being a matter of forgiveness, he feels as if she had become a different person. Divorce not being a viable option, they soon settle on a separation. Angel promises to keep her apprised of his whereabouts (his plans being to look for an estate to farm, either in the north of the country or abroad), provides her with what he assumes will be an adequate sum of money to maintain her, and drops her off at her home.

Angel ends up in Brazil. Tess, meanwhile, unable to bear staying at home, takes a series of temporary agricultural jobs, and by the fall of that year finds herself running out of money. Unable to land any more such jobs, she decides to join Marian, one of her friends from the dairy, at a farm at Flintcomb-Ash. The work there is grueling, and her employer, Farmer Groby, is a
brutish man. She perseveres for a while but soon decides to apply to Angel's parents for aid (as he had said she could if she needed to). She walks the several miles to Emminster, where the Clares' vicarage is located, but as a result of two chance encounters there, loses her confidence, and she heads back to Flintcomb-Ash, leaving her mission unaccomplished.

Midway into her return journey, she chances on a “ranter,” or Primitive Methodist preacher, addressing the inhabitants of a small village, and recognizes the man to be none other than Alec d’Urberville. Before she withdraws, he recognizes her and later catches up with her on her way home. He tells her about his recent conversion, begs her forgiveness for his past behavior, but continues to show some of his old interest in her as a lover. Though she makes him promise never to see her again, he appears at the farm several days later, and proposes to make up for his past wrongs by marrying her. She declines, and eventually informs him that she is already married (though she refuses to disclose her husband’s name). On learning this, Alec proceeds to press her in this and several subsequent meetings, insisting that she is an abandoned wife, and that she is a fool for not allowing him to help her. Soon he has given up his preaching and resumed his role of young dandy. Tess vehemently refuses his advances and writes a letter to Angel pleading with him to return to her. Again, though, circumstances conspire against her. First, on hearing that her mother is seriously ill, she leaves her job and returns home; and while her mother soon recovers, her father dies suddenly, as a result of which her family loses their house. Declining Alec’s offer to put them up at his estate, Tess goes along with arrangements made by her mother to move to Kingsbere, the seat of the old d’Urberville family, but on arriving there they learn that their house has already been let. Thus, they are literally stranded, homeless and penniless.

Soon thereafter Angel returns home from Brazil. He has recently received Tess’s letter, and because of it and his experiences abroad has forgiven her and wishes to rejoin her. He looks for her first at Flintcomb-Ash, then at her home village of Marlott, and finally at Kingsbere. There Tess’s mother reluctantly directs him to the fashionable seaside resort of Sandbourne, which he heads to that evening. The next morning he looks Tess up at the lodging-house where he is informed she is staying, only to discover that she has married Alec. She begs Angel to leave her, which he very reluctantly does. The bitter irony of her situation soon overcomes her, though, and at a slight provocation from Alec she stabs him to death and leaves the lodging-house. She manages to catch up with Angel on his way out of town, confesses her deed to him, and reaffirms
her love for him. This time, he promises to be her protector. The two proceed north along footpaths for the rest of the day and eventually settle in an unoccupied mansion, where they remain for several days. They then continue going north, Angel's plan being to reach a northern port, from which they will be able to safely leave the country. They walk well into the night, reaching Stonehenge, at which point Tess, pleading exhaustion, convinces Angel to let her stop for a while. Dawn soon breaks, and Angel perceives several figures approaching them from all directions—the local authorities. Tess is arrested, and shortly thereafter executed.

2.3 Characterisation

**Tess Durbeyfield:** The young daughter of a rural working class family at the start of the novel, Tess Durbeyfield is sent to claim kinship with the wealthier side of her family, the d'Urbervilles, when her family faces poverty. After being seduced by Alec d'Urberville, she bears his child, which dies in infancy. She then leaves her home to start a new life elsewhere. Although Tess is dutiful and obedient as the novel begins, she gains great strength and fortitude through her suffering, but remains unwavering in her love for Angel Clare and is prepared to do anything that Angel might wish.

**Angel Clare:** The son of a parson and the youngest of three brothers, Angel did not enter college as his siblings, despite his superior intellect, but rather diverged from the career path his father intended for him, the ministry, to study agriculture so that he might become a farmer. Despite holding more liberal opinions than his father and brothers, Angel Clare is nevertheless equally dogmatic and obstinate and has a deeply theoretical mindset.

**Alec d'Urberville:** The sophisticated, urbane son of the elderly, blind Mrs. Stoke-d'Urberville, Alec is rapacious and possessive, believing that his status in society and his financial situation gives him power to possess and control Tess after he gives her a job caring for his mother's chickens. After seducing Tess, Alec reforms his hedonistic ways to become a fundamentalist preacher, but soon deviates from his newfound spirituality once he sees Tess again.

**Reverend Clare:** A fundamentalist parson in the style that has nearly died out when the novel begins, Reverend Clare does not send his son, Angel, to college because the two disagree on religious philosophy. Reverend Clare is responsible for Alec d'Urberville's conversion after he confronts Alec.
Mrs. Clare: Angel's mother is a conservative woman who dislikes the idea that Angel has married Tess, believing her to be a simple country girl unsuitable for her more refined son.

Richard Crick: The dairyman and owner of Talbothays Dairy, he employs both Tess and Angel. Dairyman Crick is a gregarious, jovial man who treats Tess well as an employer.

Abraham Durbeyfield: The younger brother of Tess, Abraham accompanies his sister when she must deliver a cart of bees in place of their father.

Joan Durbeyfield: Tess's mother is an irresponsible woman who views her daughter only in exploitative terms, believing that she can send Tess to the d'Urbervilles explicitly to marry a gentleman and thus raise the fortunes of her family. Tess returns home when Joan is deathly ill, but she makes a sudden recovery just as her husband's health worsens.

John Durbeyfield: A jovial, irresponsible man, John Durbeyfield sets the plot of the novel in motion when he learns that the Durbeyfield family is descended from the renowned d'Urbervilles. John suffers from heart disease, and when he dies his family is evicted from their home and forced to move to Kingsbere.

Liza-Lu Durbeyfield: Tess's younger sister travels to Flintcomb-Ash to request that her sister return home when her parents are ill. Before Tess is caught, she asks Angel to marry Liza-Lu after Tess has died.

Car Darch: Nicknamed the Queen of Spades, this woman nearly fights Tess when Tess laughs at Car when she stains her dress with treacle. Tess is only saved from a brawl when Alec saves her. Tess later meets Car again when the two work together at Flintcomb-Ash.

Nancy Darch: Nicknamed the Queen of Diamonds, Nancy is the sister of Car and accompanies her sister to Flintcomb-Ash to work.

Farmer Groby: When Angel and Tess are in town before their wedding, this former Trantridge Cross resident identifies Tess as a woman of ill repute, causing Angel to defend her honor. Later he nearly accosts Tess as she travels to Flintcomb-Ash, and appears a third time as her employer.
at Flintcomb. Because of her early cold treatment of him, Farmer Groby is a difficult taskmaster who treats Tess poorly.

**Izz Huett:** One of the dairymaids at Talbothays Dairy with whom Tess stays, Izz Huett is also in love with Angel Clare, but after his separation from Tess when he invites her to accompany him to Brazil, Izz refuses because of Tess’s love for Angel. Izz later works with Tess at Flintcomb-Ash and sends a letter to Angel telling him to forgive Tess.

**Marian:** One of the dairymaids at Talbothays with whom Tess stays, Marian is also in love with Angel Clare and becomes an alcoholic after Tess and Angel marry. Marian invites Tess to come to Flintcomb-Ash where she works, and with Izz Huett sends a letter to Angel telling him to forgive Tess.

**Mrs. Stoke-d'Urberville:** An elderly, blind woman and the mother of Alec, she employs Tess to look after her chickens. She dies not long after Tess leaves Trantridge Cross.

### 2.4 Commentary on the Principle of Justice in the Novel

*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*" has a subtitle "A Pure Woman". The initial readers find it strange for a woman like Tess to remain pure after her experience. She chooses to make justice herself by committing crime, which in Hardy's vision had to be a clear cost for her moment of bliss. Hardy is influenced by Greek Tragedies which advocate for the destruction of the evil.

Unfairness dominates the lives of Tess and her family to such an extent that it begins to seem like a general aspect of human existence in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Tess does not mean to kill Prince, but she is punished anyway, just as she is unfairly punished for her own rape by Alec. There is no justice waiting in heaven. Christianity teaches that there is compensation in the afterlife for unhappiness suffered in this life, but the only devout Christian encountered in the novel may be the reverend, Mr. Clare, who seems more or less content in his life anyway. For others in their misery, Christianity offers little solace of heavenly justice. Mrs. Durbeyfield never mentions otherworldly rewards. Alec who is converted, preaches heavenly justice for earthly sinners, but his faith seems shallow and insincere. Generally, the moral atmosphere of the novel is **not Christian justice** at all, but **pagan injustice**.
Justice is a big theme in Tess of the D'Urbervilles. If Tess isn't responsible for her actions i.e. she is sent to Trantridge to see the D'Urbervilles against her will; she is a victim of rape; etc., why does she keep getting punished? This is a question that she asks herself at a couple of different points, and it's a question that the reader has to ask pretty frequently, too. Some literary critics have even gone so far as to call Hardy a sadist for punishing Tess so continually for sins she didn't willingly commit.

The forces that rule human life are absolutely unpredictable and not necessarily well-disposed to us. The pre-Christian rituals practiced by the farm workers at the opening of the just and fair, but erratic and uncaring. When the narrator concludes the novel with the statement that "Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals had ended his sport with Tess," we are reminded that justice must be put in ironic quotation marks, since it is not really just at all.
CHAPTER - III

CONCLUSION

Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the d’Urbervilles provides social commentary on many issues prevalent in Victorian society. In particular, Hardy uses Tess’ submission to her parents, Alec d’Urberville, Angel Clare, and society as a whole to examine the sexual double standard prevalent in Victorian society. Tess is a strong character, enduring many hardships and difficulties though various periods in her life which she tries to overcome.

The writer has laid down a contrast between false knowledge and knowledge that allows insight into the needs and desires of others is also seen in his insistence on a natural law that exists independent of humanity. He repeats several times in the novel that what has happened to Tess has not offended nature, but merely society.

The "arbitrary law of society" that Hardy criticizes is a product of organized religion. His religious characters are pious hypocrites, except for Angel’s father, who appears to have a good heart.

At the end, when Tess and Angel come to Stonehenge, commonly believed in Hardy’s time to be a pagan temple, she willingly lies down on an altar, thus fulfilling her destiny as a human sacrifice. This symbolism may explains Tess as a personification of nature—lovely and exploitable—while animal imagery throughout the novel strengthens the association. The examples are numerous: Tess’s misfortunes begin when she falls asleep while driving Prince to market, thus causing the horse’s death; at Trantridge, she becomes a poultry-keeper; she and Angel fall in love amidst cows in the fertile valley; and on the road to Flintcombe-Ashe, she compassionately kills some wounded pheasants to end their suffering.

Thus concluding, the novel portrays a very critical picture of the suffering which Tess undergoes throughout and her various attempts to overcome it. Thus after a complete analysis of the novel by the researcher it is inferred that it is a very heart rendering novel.
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