

***Regional Norms and Codes of Tragedy in Hardy's Tess Of
D'Urbervilles***

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Abstract:

Hardy established himself as a novelist in Victorian period with his novel *Desperate Remedies* (1871) and his forthcoming novels placed his name with those novelists whose literary values remarked this age. As being the creator of "*Wessex*" he painted regional colours in Victorian novels. He is notable for pointing out how some insensitive social agent take the advantage of innocent people for their mean desires. His characters are very real that have normal desires, ups and downs, belongings and conclusions. This was Hardy who delineated women as the representative of hyper sensuality and as a creature; who make a fault and then pay for it, though they belong to a rural area. His novel *Tess of D'Urbervilles* is a simple narration of misfortune bought by illicit desire of a knave person who took advantage of immature and impractical girl. He narrates this story very simply and with the language of rural people. While interpretation causes or we can say ifs and buts of tragedy in *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, Hardy keenly focuses on regional factors only. Yes these are the regional agents that bring drastic ups and downs of his protagonists in *Tess of D'Urbervilles* and obviously in his other masterpieces.

Keywords: moral values, innocent, rural, immaturity, discrimination, sexual harassment, hamartia.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Victorian period in the context of social issue is marked by economic rise due to urbanization. This industrial development not only discriminated society into upper and lower class but it also revolutionized old established religious beliefs and meaning of man- woman relationship.

This was the time when old established taboo also became weaker. It was also called “positivism” that changed fundamental theory of relationship with the opposite sex and provoked thought of social status as an individual being. Society began to self oriented where every issue (whether it was money or personal relations) was personal. This period is also considerable foe emerging women characters in literature as ‘Tess’ of Hardy is one of the finest sample of “ New Woman”. She seems to be advocating her freedom as a woman. In comparison of other novelists of this period this is Hardy who narrates sufferings of his women characters clearly without being obsessed to male dominating society. These are double standards of Victorian society that compels women to become merely as a ‘fallen women’. Though social surroundings of *Tess of D’Urbervilles* is rural England but the impact (i.e. mainly adverse) of new air of industrialization can be seen easily that is dissolved throughout. The regional norms and codes that work for the misfortune of an innocent and immature girl are coloured by this newly arrived industrial ideology of that contemporary England. As being the member of lower class society of that rural background where patriarchal society is dominant, Tess just becomes the convict of her belongings. She becomes the convict and brings her tragic end in the sense that she is overwhelmed by new ideology and she is not able to forecast its dangerous side effects. These are the effected regional, social, personal ideologies of Tess that makes her merely an object of lust and who herself attracts man like Alec for illicit relations, not approved according to rural rules. Hardy not allows women’s emancipation and violation of norms and codes of rural society by them, so he projects them in miserable condition as the penalty of it. The impact of industrial ideology is also notable in minor characters like John Durbeyfield who desires to raise his economic and social status though he is not the component of urban area.

It was not only Thomas Hardy who projected woman’s social and sexual harassment; its glimpses can be seen throughout every Victorian novel. But Hardy’s message is loud and clear regarding women, he firmly believes that if women will violate social code of conduct and if they try to deform social decorum they will bring their end and they will be blamed for it. The sense of equality is not allowed by Hardy and there are so many ifs and buts for it that has been presented by him during the development of plot. He advocates that norms and codes should be followed by everyone according to the structure and type of society.

2. DISCRIMINATION OF GENDER:

Victorian social structure was male dominating “which enables men to dominate women in social relations”. Hardy himself was the component of that social structure so obviously

discrimination of sex in its deformed state was experienced by him; hence he projects it in his literary creations. The first operating reason for tragic end of Tess is inequality of men and women. The social surroundings to which Tess belongs is far away from the mainstream of industrialization in England of that time. People of this region are aware with the industrial revolution but they cannot change suddenly their old established view regarding gender equality. Male are considered superior, powerful, and intellectual in every aspect of life over women. Women are considered just as a tool for sexual gratification. They have no importance except sexual satisfaction of male. They have not given chance and even not considered able to take part in mainstream society. It is very much clear when we see character of Tess; she has been presented as the reflection of Victorian ideology who has not been allowed to break norms of the patriarchal society. When she tries to bypass this control line; she faces haphazard. She and all women are restricted inside domestic walls, when they desire to come out the pain is ultimate. Regarding gender equality the society of Tess has double standards. Women are not allowed to make premarital relations on the other hand men are free for every licentious relation. In her domestic life Tess is under the full control of her father. He is a drunkard and this is he who compels her to go to Alec, the main reason of tragedy. Economic security has been preferred above all even over family members. When Prince, the horse that was the only source of earning is killed in an accident, Tess is blamed for it and this is the point where Tess has to surrender herself and her desire to be a teacher. She is aware of ill desires of Alec but her father's pressure compels her to carry on relation with Alec. Tess is merely a victim of patriarchy or gender inequality. There are so many incidents where gender inequality can be highlighted. Alec so called cousin of Tess, takes advantage of her innocence and makes her pregnant. When she marries Angle Clare and honestly tells about her past he also rejects her. Alec himself is not a sincere person but he cannot accept that her wife was not chaste because she is raped by other man. Alec before his marriage has been presented as a person who has unlawful relations with women but in society he has been given the authority to reject and expels out a raped girl like Tess. He does not consider her equal to her. So in every aspect whether it is domestic, social and matrimonial, Tess is not equal to her father, Alec and Angle Clare respectively. Gender discrimination is very powerful code of conduct for women in society; even girl like Tess pays for it in her entire life.

3. ROLE OF RUDE SOCIETY IN TESS' END:

Male dominating society overrules fundamental rights of women, their intellectual and active participation in social affairs. When Tess is raped by Alec nobody comes out in her favor just because it was the mind set of people that women are not allow to cross domestic walls. It has been judged by the critics that “it was Hardy’s cynical pessimism and social realism rather than his sympathy with his largely female protagonists.”In the society of Tess it is believed that women should obey every command of men without any cross question and this is the only thing they can do. Society of Tess is uneducated and they belong to lower class society, they have to work hard for their livelihood every day. Hard work is to be performed both by men and women but when it comes the question of authority of decision the total command is in men’s hands.

This society seems to be insensible, not interested in others domestic affairs or we can say that it is self centered, selfish and rude society. They get entertainment when they see domestic violence. At that time they act as dumb and deaf audience. Society is so careless that innocent, immature children are not protected in family. Elders are careless towards their filial responsibilities. Elders are so selfish that that they sacrifice their child for the fulfillment of lusty desires of others, only just for raising their economic state. The novel *Tess of D’Urbervilles* is essentially a novel of circumstances where brutal and rude dwellers of a region do play role in the main action of the novel. All sorts of man-woman relationships either legal or illegal that arise in this milieu end in tragedy. So inharmonious relations existing between men and women, husband and wife, lovers and beloved are observed from the angle of their psychological problems that do so often emerge in between them. This happens because the very atmosphere of this society is marked by infidelity, irresponsibility and so many other vices to which the inhabitants of this place are prone to. Such observations in this novel are based on his realistic experiences.

So feministic approach has been strangled in the society, their food and shelter is totally depended on men. Extreme rudeness of society is notable again, when nobody is ready to baptize Tess’ baby. She herself has to baptize her newly born baby who ultimately dies. This is again casual attitude society that is responsible for the death of newly born baby. Tess does not get respectful place in the society because she does not fulfill the definition of ideal woman according to the norms and codes of that society. She has been declared a fallen woman. Angle, Tess’ husband is presented as a person of industrialized New England, but when it comes the question to accept a raped girl his ideology fades. In other words, old established trends regarding women eclipses newly blown breeze of industrialization in case

of Angel. So regarding social ideology, male characters have two different faces, one that seems impressed by science and technology and second is in the strong grip of orthodox rules. In this context second face is more dominant over first one. His proposal to Iz Hyett to live with her not as his wife but just as his mistress, presents his hollow ideology and his rejection to accept a raped girl as his wife is his true orthodox self. He twists the definition of modern ideology according to the demand of his selfish desire. His modern ideology is biased when it comes the question of woman's chastity. Alec on the other hand takes the advantage of Tess' father's death and her weak economic condition. Economic discrimination can also be marked as valid reason for her misfortune. After her father's death when she gets family responsibilities, her weaker economic conditions compel her to face men like Alec and Angel. Society especially men starts to view Tess as an opportunity for their illicit desires, because her father is not there to protect her.

It was a typical Victorian society where social injustice is evaluated by sex not by act. Tess is not allowed to cross domestic line; on the other hand Alec and Angel are not supposed to be confined by it. Tess just becomes an outcast lady after her rape and she has nothing but rude words from the rude society. She just becomes an object for ill comments and a thing that only deserves punishment. This social injustice has been interpreted by the milieu.

4. ASSESMENT OF TESS' OWN ROLE FOR THE CALAMITY:

Tess, the protagonist of this novel has been projected as innocent, chaste and immature regional girl, but these adjectives do not allow her to be free from the charge of being responsible for her own calamity. These mentioned qualities become main cause for her tragic end. Her beauty and immature attitude towards social affairs makes her unable to identify culprit like Alec. She has been presented as a typical regional girl who never protests against injustice to her. She simply takes commands from her father, and even after her rape she remains silent. Though Hardy tries to paint her as a new woman but in respect of woman justice she does not appears so.

If she would have been out of regional society and would have been brought up in any big city it could be guessed that she would not have been faced that cruel end. She tries to bring forward those typical regional ideals where women are just puppets in the hands of men. In several moments, when she herself baptize her baby she emerges as bold and powerful lady but it becomes too late to regain her past. Her confession about her rape before her husband creates all problems. She forgives her husband's premarital affairs but after her confession she is rejected by her husband. Even a single time there comes no view where she has been seen

to raise her voice against her husband's casual attitude. She simply accepts calamity as her fate.

5. CONCLUSION:

Hardy does not accept woman's potential in social affairs. He makes them deprived them from fundamental rights. Tess seems just a slave to the decision of men and to her social norms and codes. Readers may have sympathy for her but as a heroine she is weak. She is a victim of patriarchal society and norms and codes set by them for women. Woman like Tess has no adequate place in the society and she herself not fight back for it. So partial social regulations, along with Tess' own nature is responsible for the ultimate calamity.

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