

ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL TESS OF THE D' URBERVILLES THROUGH FEMINISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper analyzes Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles through a feminist lens, exploring the complex social dynamics that contribute to the tragic fate of the protagonist, Tess. The study examines three primary research questions: the extent to which Victorian society is responsible for Tess's exploitation, the roles of religious and familial influences in her tragic end, and the application of feminist theory in Hardy's portrayal of her character. The research delves into the gender inequality present in the novel, highlighting the limited agency of women in Victorian society, and the patriarchal attitudes of Victorian men towards women. Additionally, it discusses the impact of Tess's social class and family background on her hardships and predicaments. Using a qualitative methodology, this paper provides an in-depth exploration of the societal and personal factors that lead to Tess's downfall, while emphasizing Hardy's feminist critique of the era's treatment of women. Ultimately, this study offers new insights into the gendered dimensions of the novel, shedding light on the enduring relevance of its themes.

INTRODUCTION

The novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles is written by Thomas Hardy and it was published in 1891. He was born on June 2, 1840, in the village of Bock Hampton located in southwestern England. He got his early education from Julia Martin's school in his village. He learned French, German and Latin. He is known as a prominent novelist of his age. Apart from this novel, he contributes so many novels, short stories and 800 poems to English literature. He is the creator of the democratic novel in English literature because the early novelists followed the accepted belief of Aristotle and chose their heroines from the highest rank of society while he chose all of his heroines from the lower and middle classes. His famous novels are published in serial. His famous novels are The Greenwood Tree published in 1872, Far from Madding Crowd in 1874, The Return of the Native in 1878, The Mayor of the Caster Bridge in 1886, The Woodlanders in 1887, and the novel under discussion in 189. He is also known as the creator of philosophical novels. He died on January 11, 1928. In this novel, the writer tells us a story of a poor girl, an ordinary girl an innocent character, who belongs to the middle class. Who suffers many troubles in her life due to being poor and meets tragic ends. The novel is very short and consists of seven phases each representing a period of her life. One of the best themes of this novel is men's dominance over women and social injustice. The novel tells us about the exploitation of a poor girl Tess, who was forced by her family and sent to their so-called relatives' house to earn money and feed her family, there she meets a boy named Alec d' Urbervilles son of a merchant. Who was somehow womanized person, who takes advantage and seduces her, and finally raped her, She leaves him and comes back to her home and gives birth to an illegitimate child, all these events happen in the first section of the novel when she is working as a maiden. Then she meets another character Angel Clare, the son of a minister, he likes her and loves her and then they marry. Tess was so frightened because of her past one day she told him about her past and he left her and went to Brazil. He comes backs and found her married, now she was married to Alec who first raped her. Although she was not happy with Alec, she married with him because she needed money to survive and to feed her family; she was forced by her family to marry Alec. They both make a plan and kill Alec and elope. They lived a very happy life until she was captured and hanged for Alec's murder.

In this novel, the writer not only tells us the story of a poor girl but actually, presents us with the society, the beliefs, and the norms of the Victorian era. How society treats women generally and the poor middle-class women particularly, As the research topic suggests that analysis is through a feministic perspective so our concern is feminism in the novel. As far as feminism is concerned, it is a social term, which aims to get equal rights for women. As we all experience every society treats men and women equally and makes a difference between them.

Hussein (2007) in his novel “A Thousand Splendid Sons,” discusses the same issue, in his novel, the writer relates the story of two Afghan girls, Mariam and Laila their hardships and troubles imposed by the patriarchal society of Afghanistan. He also narrates their constant struggle to find peace and equality in that society. And after long suffering troubles and sorrows, they finally meet happiness and their life becomes what they want. Although Mariam meets tragic end like Tess she makes Leila’s life comfortable and peaceful. Gender discrimination and inequality are the same as in Victorian society in England or the patriarchal society of Afghanistan.

Significance of the study

The research is important and worth, because it contain information about Victorian age their belief and norms. It also discusses the attitude of capitalist society towards husbandry. It contains information about the middle class people and the way they treated during that era. The study also discusses the theory of feminism and it’s important for peaceful society. It is fruitful for those who are interested in literature and English society.

Definition of the term Feminism

Feminism is the social theory which aims men and women should be equal socially, politically and economically. It highlights the various ways of women’s oppression, suppression and repression.

Review of related research

This study discusses the novel Tess of the d’Urbervilles through a feministic perspective. So the literature review comprises the works on a feministic approach to the novel Tess of the d’Urbervilles.

A few studies done by some researchers are very similar to my work. They discuss gender equality, women suppression and their survival in Victorian capitalist patriarchic and male dominance society.

A study was conducted by Melita Novita Sari (2014) on the plight of men’s domination over women in Thomas Hardy’s novel Tess of the d’Urbervilles. The writer choses the topic because she wanted to get the attention of the people toward men domination and women’s oppression which was order of the day, The paper also discusses women’s constant resistance against men’s domination by taking into consideration the protagonist of the novel Tess. The writer analyzes the novel by using Emma Goldman’s feminist theory. The writer’s arguments show us three different factors based upon men dominating women, which are church, property and authority, these factors became responsible for the protagonist’s catastrophe. We can see all these factors while reading the novel. How the Angles makes the heroin helpless while being the son of the priest and even after Tess’s confession.

Another study conducted by Yuan and Yan Rav (2018) The work analyzes the novel through character and its social backdrop and the primitive conventional religions. The work discusses the tragic doom of the protagonist the impact of other characters upon the main character and above all the disturbance and the bad impact of privatization in Victorian period on women especially middle-class women.

Holly Rose Lit win; Cleveland State University, in his work; cultural criticism within Thomas Hardy’s novel. He thinks that the novel is about the harsh condemnation of capitalism, the people and their belief about women, religious doctrine and the loopholes of education and judicial system. The devastating force of industrialism almost ruins the agrarianism of England. He thinks that the novel is

a violent condemnation of the Victorian beliefs and values made by the elite of the society. Hardy stands against the beliefs and norms of Victorian society particularly, regarding women's status and their treatment by a man which is reflected in his novel.

According to the study conducted by Saima Manzoor and Najia Zaidi (2015), Hardy's attitude towards gender issues; in their joint work they observed his work reflects his cognizance of injustice and inequalities against women. He was a great sympathizer of women who became the victims of social and sexual discrimination. The paper was conducted to examine and relate Hardy's disposition regarding women and their troubles, simply the social and economic subjection of women. The paper also declares the men of the intense law dominance society of that age.

Mona Holmberg (2010) the writer argues and presents three different elements as evidence to clarify Tess is a victim of her society. The writer argues in the essay, that being a Victorian woman was not easy you have to obey and do the right things to follow the rules made by men. Actually Tess doesn't act willingly; it was the situation and position of the protagonist that compels her to do what she does. Hardy portrays a pure woman. She begrudgingly accepts the oppression, which ultimately led her tragic end. But she still tries to change her position and life; she was beautiful enough to attract people's attention. As Hardy praises her lips, looks and dress at the beginning of the novel which shows us the writer interest in her, which is why she attracts Alec and ultimately she has been raped. Being the eldest in her family, she had the right to support her family, her mother and her father forced her to support her family, and this family pressure somehow contributed to her tragic end. Finally, she was a member of the church, she followed the Bible's words, serving God and honoring her parents, but the church didn't improve her circumstances. The church refuses to bury her child saying illegitimate, this act desperate her from the church and contributes to her tragic end.

Farkhanda (2013) a Marxist studies of Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles. According to the writer, the only reason behind all these inequalities and exploitation is the economic status in society and the social class she belongs to. It portrays the life experience of a working group in Victorian society. The paper also discussed the major aspect of exploitation by using Marxist theory. The work further equates the life experience protagonist with Hardy's life. The writer argues that being female Tess suffers more as compared to Hardy.

Srayish (2017) the writer thinks that the writers of the Victorian age were mainly concerned with women. The Victorian novelists focused their attention on women's suffering and endurance. The novelists of the nineteenth century got feminist ideas in their minds and through their work they addressed the issues regarding women in the Victorian society. And they tried to remove the hindrances and hurdles in their paths. The writer tried to collect their opinion on women's rights.

Metha (2014) he argues in the novel Hardy refuses to accept the concept of Greek tragedy and makes an extraordinary character for his novel. He chooses heroin for his novel from the lower rank of society and gives her such qualities which makes the character a sublime character in literature. His characters are very sweet, loyal and passionate which is why they catch the attention of the reader and they also get sympathy and commiseration from the people. Barret (2013) the writer argues that Victorian society considered women just housewives and mothers to care for their children. Society did not allow them to work outside the home and when they tried to do so they looked at them negatively. Further, the writer argues, that during that time women were harassed by their male counterparts from outside the household. Women were confined to their houses and whenever they went outside to earn money to support their husbands they were criticized bitterly, even though they were deprived of their basic rights during Victorian society.

Gao (2013) his work discusses Hardy's masterpiece, the socio-cultural and chronological backdrops and the character of the protagonist of the novel and her flaws. The paper also discusses the causes of the tragedy and the spot of women in the society. The paper further discusses the economic attachment in the Tess tragedy by analyzing contemporary society.

Research Methodology Methodological framework

The researcher used a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Qualitative research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to achieve an understanding of fundamental opinion, reason and motivation. A qualitative design means non-numeric data, so the topics undertaken do not need numerical data; they only need understanding, rendition and clarification of words, phrases and themes. So the study relies on the compilation of qualitative data, such as words, phrases and sentences. So the study aims at description, rich understanding and insight into women suppression in the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

So this study deals with characters, in the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy. The hardship, frets, discrimination, and unfair treatment they face throughout the novel.

Techniques of data collection

There are two types of data we have, primary and secondary. Primary collected from the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy. Secondary data is taken from other sources such as books, different articles commentaries on the novel and other sources like internet websites about the novel *Tess of d'Urbervilles*. While constructing this research the researcher conducted several steps. To get a deeper understanding of the novel, the writer conducted a deep study on the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. In this step, the writer took important notes and points that are related to the topic under work. Secondly, determining the character is to be analyzed. The third step was searching for related data from different sources and the internet. The writer collected supporting theories and related studies to analyze women characters in the novel based on a feministic perspective.

The researcher used different tools to collect data for study by using the internet, going to the library and studying books related to the study by reading the actual text of the novel.

Theoretical framework

The study aims to analyze the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* through a feministic perspective. Generally, feministic theories study and talk about women, we can say the core concern of feminists is to talk about gender inequality altogether. It describes the gender roles for social, political and economic inequality between men and women inside the house as well as public areas. The main object of feminism is to eliminate inequality and sexism by rendering balanced opportunities to both sexes in all paths of life. After the advent of feminism, women started to gain their rights gradually, before feminism women were oppressed and obliged and act according to the rules and laws made by men. They were confined to homes and were not allowed to go public sphere or participate in any function of society. Women were subject to the system and the do whatever men wanted. It was then, when feminism advent women began to understand their place and status in society and they gradually started their rights. Simply feminism provided the rights of women. It was feminism that allowed women to get education rights, divorce rights and property rights. Before this only upper-class people were eligible for education, it was feminism that provided awareness to women and society based on patriarchy, and after this woman got their real status in the society.

In the novel, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Hardy points out the tight and narrow laws of English society during the Victorian period. During the Victorian period, women were subjected to and were treated as mere objects, particularly middle-class women. In the novel Hardy portrays a young, beautiful and innocent girl who was victimized by other characters and ultimately, hanged by authority. As the novel tells, she was seduced and compelled by Alec so-called relative and who took advantage of her innocence and stole her purity. Then she meets another character Angel with whom she was in

love, and after marrying her alone and left for Brazil. Being a member of the church, he does not behave what she expects from her. She was still determined and she never gave up while facing all these bitter experiences. She wants revenge from Alec and eventually, she kills him and elopes with Angle the one who left her, angle cannot save her, and she is captured and hanged by authority. She was tortured by society, ignored by the church and hanged by the authority, but unfortunately, Alec was free from any punishment and blame, which shows the inequality in that era. The feminism theory is used to help the writer in analyzing the issues raised in the novel, as stated in the statement of the problem. However, the writer of this study also used suggestions from other sources which help to support the theory, so that the analysis can be done comprehensively.

Analysis

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was published in 1891. The novel is very short and consists of seven phases; each phase represents Tess's life experience which she undergoes. The novel also presents us with the Victorian society environment its traditions its social and political conditions which compelled every woman like Tess. The work also displays to us the religion and moralities of Victorian society which was in favor of males and against the female.

Basically, in the novel Hardy portrays the story of a young, beautiful and innocent rural girl, belonging to the middle class who became the victim of society in many dimensions. Hardy presents the status of women in the shape of Tess. Simply Tess represents the women of that time. Tess is the heroin of the novel and the whole story revolves around her characters. Tess belongs to a poor family and her family is one of the noblest families in the old time. As I mentioned above, the novel comprises seven phases. The first phase, Maiden, this phase covers almost four months of Tess's life, in this section, the writer introduces us to the main character and the heroin, by praising her beautiful figure, her lips, her eyes her bonnet, her getups. The writer presents her as an innocent and pure woman unaware of the world's evil and danger of society. Tess family was very poor economically and she was forced to improve her family position, her family horse, Prince, died which was the only source of their income. She was pressured by her family to go to their so-called relative for the job. In this phase, Tess meets another character who ultimately steals her virginity, so this phase is the main part of the novel as well as of the heroin.

In the second phase, Maiden is no more, as we know Tess was raped by Alec in the first phase and now she is pregnant. She returns to her home, and she gives birth to a child, an illegitimate child of Alec. Now, Tess was in great mental disturbance and she had isolated herself from everything completely, and she began to understand herself as a victim. She is observing nature through the mind and heart full of disturbance and desperation. She wants to isolate herself from her surroundings as well as the people and even her siblings. The third phase, The Rally, presents us with Tess as a mature and beautiful woman and she began as a milkmaid at Talbot Hay's dairy. She meets another character Angle Clare; he is an open-minded and thoughtful character. He was somehow a different person who didn't believe in traditions and norms. He wants to improve human honor and status; he belongs to a religious family. In the fourth phase, the consequence, in this section Angles falls in love with Tess, but Tess is reluctant and horrendous about her past. She could not deceive Angle but on the other hand, she would not leave Angle. The phase also contains Tess and Angle's marriage ceremony and Tess's confession in front of Angle and refusal of Angle to forgive her sin.

In the fifth phase, the woman pays, in this phase, Tess is abandoned by her husband and she is desperate and regretful because she was in real love with Angle and does not want to leave her. Eventually, she went home with despondency and self-hatred. In this phase, The Convert, Tess is forced and compelled by her family to return to Alec again and accept a marriage proposal. Being the eldest child of her family, she was helpless, she had to support her family and there was no way other than to marry Alec. The seventh phase, The Fulfillments, as we know she was raped by Alec before and she had fervent hatred for Alec. She wants revenge on Alec; eventually, she takes her revenge and kills him. After killing Alec she marries Angle whom she loves, and they live happily for some months. Ultimately, she was captured and hanged by police for Alec's murder and she came to a tragic

end.

Victorian society and women status during Victorian era

In the nineteenth century, society treated women as second-class citizens as compared to men. Though they have certain legal rights but were deprived of their basic rights in the real sense. During that time the foremost duty of women was to produce children take care of them, and live their lives being good and obedient wives. They were considered as isolated creature and their lives were confined to the household. During Victorian society, there were concepts of the private and public sphere, the former was for women and the latter was for men. There was social, political and economic discrimination between men and women, women were completely dependent on their husbands and other family members to survive.

The Victorian period was named because of Queen Victoria, who was the monarch of England and ruled the Empire from 1837 to 1901. She is also known as the Empress of India. Actually, Victorian age was the age of social, political and cultural reform and of scientific progress in United Kingdom. During the Victorian period, Britain was the biggest and largest economic power in the world. The factory system was gradually supplanted by a system of chores at home. The Industrial Revolution causes a great claim for women and children labor in the Victorian era. Both women and children were exploited bitterly; they worked very long hours and were paid even less. Regarding political life in Britain, the House of Commons was headed by two parties, the Tory which later became conservative and the Whig which became the liberal. Britain was in great political and social unrest during the nineteenth century. The most turning points in Britain during the nineteenth century were industrialization and colonization, which had positive as well as negative impacts on society. Certainly, it was an era of eminent transition in the British history. Both of these enriched the wealth and made the empire economic power.

The Victorian era also represents great prudishness and wisdom, because so many political, social and religious movements started amid this period. But, despite all the success, the condition of women and children was not good at that time. No doubt, it was a complex age in the history of England. There were four classes in Victorian society upper class, middle class, Noble class and working class. Each of these classes had its standard of living. This classification was based on hierarchy, there were different laws for these classes and society looked at them differently. There was no punishment for the noble and upper classes as shown in the novel, the laws treated them according to their status. The upper and noble classes were beyond access of law and they were superior on the other hand middle and working classes were the victims and laws as well as traditions.

So the middle-class and working-class people were in great difficulty, particularly the women. However, the most significant role of women during Victorian society was good wives and mothers. According to John Simkin, women were not allowed to do anything without their husband's permission, if women marry then women and their property automatically become in their husband's control. Another big issue faced by women is divorce, they can't get divorce without any difficulty from their husbands, but men have a pro to divorce their wives in charge of unfaithfulness and other blame. Women could not get an education of the same standard as men. The only duty and responsibility of women is to raise their children and to run the home system, they thought women's education unnecessary.

Features of Tess character Tess as a beautiful heroine

Tess, being the heroin of the novel is a beautiful, attractive and fetching character. She looks gorgeous; hence the writer praises her physical appearance. "She was a fine and attractive girl---not handsome as 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 only one of the white companies who could boast of such a pronounced adornment Hardy" (1891, p.12.).

By reading these lines, one can make a sense of Tess as a beautiful heroine. That is why she first

attracts Angele at the beginning of the novel who wishes to dance with her in the May dance ceremony. Later, this beautiful face attracts Alec but he becomes the main reason for her tragic end. These lines also indicate the writer's interest in her; therefore the writer notices every part of her body. The above lines show that she is beautiful enough to attract people's attention.

Tess as a responsible daughter

Tess is the eldest among her siblings. Being the eldest child she tries her best to better her family life. She never refuses to accept her duty towards her family, her parents and her siblings. After the death of her family's horse, her responsibility increased and she was forced by her parents to do a job to feed her family. Even she was pressured to marry Alec. She was aware of her family's poor condition; she was confused about her father's health too. Although she possesses strong hatred for Alec, she reluctantly and unwillingly accepts his proposal to marry, just for the sake of her family's wishes. She thought that if she marries Alec then her family's financial position would be solved, that is the only reason behind the marriage. She took every step just to ameliorate her family's conditions, she never thought about herself even her compromise on her purity to change and improve her family. She faced all the troubles and for her family's sake, this shows her sincere responsibility towards her family.

Tess as a pure woman

As we know Tess is an innocent girl, born into a poor family and she is unaware of the outside world and its evil. Tess's purity is the purity of heart and brain it's not just physical purity like another character. When Angle wishes to dance with her she refuses to accept his request, and when Alec proposes her first time she turns down his proposal, this shows Tess's purity. Being a young female in that society and living like Tess was not easy. Society looks at Tess as a prostitute girl because she was raped but she does not do all these willingly. She was compelled by her family to earn money and partly she was seduced by male character. She was not the part of sin consciously. So, we can say Tess is a pure girl in the real sense. It is the surrounding which makes her helpless to act accordingly. When she accepts to go Alec's house she was not happy but she unwillingly does it for the sake of her family. Despite all these cruelty she was not prejudiced with Alec because he supports her family. She loves Angle whole-heartedly; although he leaves her, she never reproaches him. She looks at things positively it is the quality which makes her different from the rest of the fictional character.

Tess as a dutiful wife

Tess is not only beautiful heroin; she is also a good and obedient wife. Although Tess and Angle live for a short period, but they pass very happily. She never complained about anything. Whatever she listened and whatever Angle said, she respected and obeyed it. She never expresses any wrong word which hurt her husband; she wishes to die in his arms.

Tess as a brave girl

She faced many difficulties and problems but she never lost hope. She was still fighting for impunity and happiness. Throughout the novel, she faces tortures and troubles mentally and emotionally. Tess entire life is the story of suffering and sacrifice, she undergoes mental as well as emotional torture, but she endures all these complexities bravely. She was ignored by society and religion but she stands against the norms and values of that time. She was neglected by her lover but she waited hopefully and finally found her love. She stands with her family in the very worst time and helped them. She faced strong social criticism. Being a woman she takes her revenge from upper-class members and saves the life of so many Tess. She struggles for happiness lonely and meets it for a very short period. She did everything for her family whatever she could.

Conclusion

After reading the novel, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* written by Thomas Hardy, the writer tries to analyze the novel through a feministic perspective. The novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* explains to us the social, political and cultural backgrounds of England during the Victorian era and women's condition by portraying Tess's character. Women were treated as second citizens and they were deprived of their fundamental rights. They had been crushed by their male counterpart and they were subjected to men and considered as submissive characters. Women were under the shackle of men and the laws and beliefs made by men, men treated them as mere objects. But women stand against this gender discrimination as we have an example of Tess, who constantly struggled to change her life and to change her family problem. After reading the novel, I have come to conclude that the main reason behind Tess's misfortune is her family's financial problem which compelled her to go to Alec's house and to meet Angle. Apart from this, there are other problems as well, like the social environment, religion, laws and costumes made by men who contribute to her tragic end.

In the novel, Thomas Hardy talks about the injustice and double standard of Victorian society, which ultimately crushed an innocent character. The novel presents us with the tragic end of the protagonist and the reasons and circumstances behind this misfortune. The novel also portrays male superiority and female inferiority during the Victorian age. Two important themes exist in the novel, social injustice and male domination. The novel also presents us with the social stratification in Victorian society and its diverse mentality. It also discusses the major problems faced by Victorian people in general and women in particular.

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