



No More *Tess* Please !

Dr. Mudita Agnihotri

Professor, Dept. of English, K.G.M,
Gurukul Kangri (Deemed to be
University), Haridwar

Once Kierkegaard stated, “ To be a woman is so strange, so complicated that not one predicate comes near expressing it and that the multiple predicates that one would like to use are so contradictory that only a woman put up with it.”¹ This is the real concept for woman in the men’s world. She could never be considered as a normal human being but rather someone “else” in the disguise of someone special. Not strange, that feminist like de Beauvoir has refuted this statement harshly. This paper aims to study the double-standard mentality of the society in relation to condition of woman in present scenario with a visualization of Hardy’s *Tess*. Presently woman has to suffer a lot due to social taboos, conventions and obligations. The situation leading to any mishappening could be controlled with prudence and endurance. The question arises that after all why a girl is punished vehemently by the social system even if she is innocent and chaste. This paper comes as a call to all the concerned for the welfare of girlhood or womanhood. By having some speculations and a sense of duty girls like Tess could be saved easily. For this a strong awareness is required among us and to create a world where gender equality pervades in true sense because after a long gap of centuries too the condition of women has not changed in the social context. Women are still expected to stick to their conventional roles and chastity is the only value by which they can please the society.

Thomas Hardy, a prominent novelist of Victorian era, has proved himself to be a wonderful observer of human psyche in his novel *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. Though he is stamped to be a man with gloomy outlook towards world and all its intercourses, but he has been extremely accurate in his exploration of human heart to heart. The Protagonist of the novel, seems to be a person or victim beyond any era and quite relevant from past to present. The Tess of Hardy still innumerable found in this world and they suffer due to the situation/circumstances and are bound to lead a disgusting life. Hardy deliberately shows the fatal incidents in the novel which assist in creating a critical picture of human society which pretends to be civilized. Our so-called modern and civilized society has yet not left its initial form in the name of tradition and customs. The most painful agony for a woman is the sexual double standard which is imposed upon her and that is what *Tess* is all



about. It seems that the biggest gift a girl can give to her husband is her virginity irrespective of the purity of her heart even though in her past she lost herself because of the most fatal incident of a woman's life- rape.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles was first published in 1891. It is the story of a Victorian era western country-side. But the appeal and the incidents are still universal and contemporary. The gap of the centuries has yet not filled our mental gaps. Rather, in a sense, our forefathers were better than us.

“The early woman was intensely occupied from dawn to dusk. Her major duty was food gathering and this work kept the tribe alive. At no point in the history did women, with or without the children, rely on their hunting mates for food. A mass evidence also shows that the earliest families consisted of females and their children since all tribal hunting societies were centered on and organized through the mother. The young males either left or were driven, while the females stayed close to their mother.”²

But

“As societies evolved, male took control through brutal force. One of the immediate measures was to prohibit women leaving their houses at night and during the day so as to confine them more and more to the home. Gradually, women become not only simply the property but legally part of their fathers or husbands.”³

It's a well-known and tested fact that a girl child is always discriminated in the family. No matter, however modern and open-minded parents are, there will be a slight difference between the nourishment of the male and female child with a few exceptions, all because a male child is still considered as a bread-winner and shelter for the family. The attitude of Tess' parents in the novel is quite depressing towards her. She is nothing more than a means to win their prosperity to them. Without considering her age and innocence they throw her into a black hole from where she never succeeded in rescuing herself.

“ We must take ups wi' the downs, Tess,' said she; 'and never could your high blood have been found out at a more called-for moment. You must try your friends. Do ye know that there is a rich Mrs. D'Urberville living on the

outskirts o' The Chase, who must be our relation? You must go to her and claim kin, and for some help in our trouble.”⁴

Poor Tess ashamed of death their family horse prince finally accepts that fatal proposal,

“ ‘I don't know what to say!’ answered the girl restlessly. ‘ it is for you to decide. I killed the old horse, and I suppose I ought to do something to get ye a new one. But-but- I don't quite like Mr. d'Urbervilles being there!’”⁵

The next phase of Tess' life starts where Alec, the son of Tess' employer tries to seduce her in many ways and at last succeeds in his cruel ambitions. The gestures of men towards women often are disclosed through every small activity as in the novel. Alec is going to Trantridge with Tess , he intentionally drives the gig very fast to have the physical touch of her. He advises Tess to hold him by his waist. And eventually blackmails her to give physical satisfaction.

“ ‘But I don't want anybody to kiss me, sir!’ she implored, a big tear beginning to roll down her face, and the corners of her mouth trembling in her attempts not to cry. ‘And I wouldn't ha' come if I had known!’”⁶

The response from Tess was not very encouraging. After all she is a young, innocent village girl. Her resistance against Alec's advances makes Alec comment on her, “Mighty sensitive for a cottage girl.”⁷. Here Alec shows the menfolk view toward a poor girl that could be attained at ease. The other incidents in the novel also help in disposing the bad intention of Alec. He earnestly proposes to get back with him while returning from the fair. Though she did not like the idea yet she had no stamina to walk around. She soon gets asleep because of the intoxication of wine and Alec rapes her.

“Rape is used as a terrorizing and punitive mechanism against women. So in all class, caste, poor-rich struggles women are seen in the same way.”⁸

And this is what Alec did to Tess. Tess returns back to home where she gives birth to “Sorrow”, Alec's child. This child dies in a few days leaving a large vacuum in Tess' life.

Our society is so much moulded against woman that she is not safe anywhere. The structure of the social system tends to throw her inside the four walls in the name of her security. Every



society, every civilization, more or less, degraded the position of women. Girls like Tess face life everywhere, everyday, not only in the time of Hardy, but even today, in each corner of the world. This is only to make her realize that she is weak and her real place is home. Its not the outsiders who try to molest the young girls but in most of the cases they are the near kins who assault them. Their minds are such sick and rotten that the age of the “female” doesn’t matter for them at all. After any such incident society (best example is ours) always blames the victim. She is punished throughout her life. Nevertheless, if society would have been with the victim, girls were more secure, mentally as well as physically. No matter, how lascivious a man is, he will always ask an untouched girl for wedding purpose. This is what Angel Clare did.

Angel meets Tess at a dairy-farm where he was completing his training and Tess is one of the dairy-maids. He is attracted towards the beauty and innocence of Tess.

“‘What a fresh and virginal daughter of nature that milkmaid is!’ he said to himself.”⁹

Gradually Angel falls in love with Tess. Tess loved him in a hidden way but was afraid of her past and that is why she never reveals her feelings for Angel. She remains sad as ever. When Angel asks the reason of her sadness she replies,

“‘Oh, ‘tis only- about myself,’ she said, with a frail laugh of sadness, fitfully beginning to peel ‘a lady’ meanwhile. ‘Just a sense of what might have been with me! My life looks as if it had been wasted for want of chances! When I see what you know, what you have read, and seen, and thought, I feel what a nothing I am!....There is no more spirit in me.’”¹⁰

This is the sense of vacuum a girl of merely 18-19 years going through, drowning into the sea of guilt for a crime which she never committed. This is only because a girl is made to believe from a very early age that there is nothing more important to her than her physical purity. She is not an individual but just a commodity which is to be saved till a certain age for a certain man. Firestone considers it as the Sex Privatisation of woman,



“This process blinds women to their generality of a class. Each woman is considered someone unique as compared with other women. This is a false idealization of a privatized object. It creates confusion by identifying one’s sexuality with one’s individuality, keeping women from developing real individuality.”¹¹

One day Angel Clare proposes Tess to marry him. But Tess denies, “ ‘O Mr. Clare- I can not be your wife- I cannot be!’ ”¹² Angel insists but Tess is so much despaired that she keeps on saying, “ ‘Don’t ask me. I told you why-partly. I am not good enough-not worthy enough.’ ”¹³ Finally, Angel succeeds in having Tess’ agreement for marriage. As the marriage approaches, Tess grows increasingly troubled. She writes to her mother for advice; Joan tells her to keep silent about her past. Her anxiety increases when a man from Trantridge, recognises her while she is out shopping with Angel and crudely alludes to her sexual history. Angel overhears and flies into an uncharacteristic rage. Tess resolves to deceive Angel no more, and writes a letter describing her dealings with d’Urberville and slips it under his door. After Angel greets her with the usual affection the next morning, she discovers the letter under his carpet and realises that he has not seen it. She destroys it. The wedding goes smoothly. Tess and Angel spend their wedding night at an old d’Urberville family mansion, where Angel confesses that he once had a brief affair with an older woman in London. When she hears this story, Tess feels sure that Angel will forgive her own past, and finally tells him about her relationship with Alec.

“She bent forward, at which each diamond on her neck gave a sinister wink like a toad’s; and pressing her forehead against her temple she entered on her story of her acquaintance with Alec d’Urberville and its results, murmuring the words without flinching, and her eyelids drooping down.”¹⁴

Angel, however, is appalled by Tess's confession, and he spends the wedding night sleeping on a sofa. Tess almost falls in his legs,



“ ‘In the name of our love, forgive me!’ she whispered with a dry mouth. ‘ I have forgiven you for the same.’”¹⁵

But Angel remains cruelly unturned,

“ ‘O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case! You were one person; now you are another. My God- how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque-prestidigitation as that!’”¹⁶

This is the whole truth of the male-dominated social mentality. The double standard imposed upon the social relationships. Angel Clare is a much worse character than Alec. He is not all at guilty of his own past which he committed knowingly but is very much conscious of his wife’s even when she is innocent by every angle. He proved that a male point of view can recognize women only as a body and not as a soul, only as usable commodity and not as an individual, a human being.

Tess, although devastated, accepts the sudden estrangement as something she deserves. After a few awkward, awful days, she suggests that they separate, telling her husband that she will return to her parents. Angel gives her some money and promises to try to reconcile himself to her past, but warns her not to try to join him until he sends for her. After a quick visit to his parents, Angel takes ship for Brazil to start a new life. She has to do something for her livelihood, something for her life.

“We have to realize quickly that a “shelter” is not “four walls” or “a roof” over her head for a woman who wants to escape an abusive relationship. By the time a woman takes the extremely difficult step to leave her husband and home, she has already been subjected to relentless “victim-blaming” from everyone. Empathy for her is primary to support.”¹⁷

A very bleak period in Tess's life begins. She returns home for a time but, finding this unbearable, decides to join Marian and Izz at a starve-acre farm called Flintcombe-Ash. On the road, she is recognised and insulted by a farmer named Groby (the same man who slighted her in front of



Angel); this man proves to be her new employer. At the farm, the three former milkmaids perform very hard physical labour.

One day, Tess attempts to visit Angel's family at the parsonage in Emminster. As she nears her destination, she encounters Angel's priggish older brothers and the woman his parents once hoped he would marry, Mercy Chant. They do not recognise her, but she overhears them discussing Angel's unwise marriage. Shamed, she turns back. On the way, she overhears a wandering preacher and is shocked to discover that he is Alec d'Urberville, who has been converted to Christianity under the Reverend James Clare's influence.

Alec and Tess are each shaken by their encounter. Alec tells her that he wants to convert her. On hearing this Tess turns angry,

“ ‘Don't go with on with it!’ she cried passionately, as she turned away from him to stile by the wayside, on which she bent herself. ‘I can't believe in such sudden things! I feel indignant with you for talking to me like this, when you know- when you know what harm you've done me!....’”¹⁸

However, Alec soon comes to ask Tess to marry him. She tells him she is already married. Tess tells him that she lives away from her husband and suffered all these hardships- social, physical and financial- because of her earlier seduction by Alec.

“ ‘No,’ she murmured. ‘He is far away.’
‘Far away? From You? What sort of husband can he be?’
‘O, do not speak against him! It was through you! He found out.....’”¹⁹

He returns again in early spring, when Tess is hard at work feeding a threshing machine. He tells her he is no longer a preacher and wants her to be with him. She slaps him when he insults Angel, drawing blood and then,

“ Now, punish me! She said, turning up her eyes to him with the hopeless defiance of the sparrow's gaze before its captor twists its neck. ‘Whip me, crush me; you



need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry. Once victim, always victim- that's the law!''²⁰

Till here Tess has lost all her patience. She is fed up of her destiny, her life, everything. Then she learns from her sister, Liza-Lu, that her mother, Joan, is dying and her father very ill. Tess rushes home to look after them. Her mother soon recovers, but her father unexpectedly dies. The family is now evicted from their home, as Durbeyfield held only a life lease on their cottage. Alec tells Tess that her husband is never coming back and offers to house the Durbeyfields on his estate. Tess refuses his assistance. She had earlier written Angel a letter full of love, self-abasement, and pleas for mercy; now, however, she finally admits to herself that Angel has wronged her and scribbles a hasty note saying that she will do all she can to forget him, since he has treated her so unjustly.

“ O why have you treated me so monstrously, Angel! I do not deserve it. I have thought it all over carefully, and I can never, never forgive you! You know that I did not intend to wrong you- why have you so wronged me? You are cruel, cruel indeed! I will try to forget you. It is all injustice I have received at your hands!''²¹

The Durbeyfields plan to rent some rooms in the town of Kingsbere, ancestral home of the d'Urbervilles, but they arrive there to find that the rooms have already been rented to another family. All but destitute, they are forced to take shelter in the churchyard, in a plot called 'd'Urberville Aisle'. Alec reappears and importunes Tess again. In despair, she looks at the entrance to the d'Urberville vault and wonders aloud "Why am I on the wrong side of this door!"

In the meantime, Angel has been very ill in Brazil and, his farming venture having failed, he heads home to England. On the way, he confides his troubles to a stranger, who tells him that he was wrong to leave his wife; what she was in the past should matter less than what she might become. Angel begins to repent his treatment of Tess.

Upon his return to his family home, Angel has two letters waiting for him: Tess's angry note and a few cryptic lines from 'two well-wishers' (Izz and Marian), warning him to protect his wife. Their words are worth mentioning.



“.....A woman should not be try'd beyond her Strength, and continual dropping will wear away a Stone-ay, more- a Diamond.”²²

He sets out to find Tess and eventually locates Joan, now well-dressed and living in a pleasant cottage. After responding evasively to his inquiries, she finally tells him her daughter has gone to live in Sandbourne, a fashionable seaside resort. There, he finds Tess living in an expensive boarding house under the name "Mrs. d'Urberville." When he asks for her, she appears in startlingly elegant attire and stands aloof. He tenderly asks her forgiveness, but Tess, in anguish, tells him he has come too late: thinking he would never return, she yielded at last to Alec d'Urberville's persuasion and has become his mistress. She gently asks Angel to leave and never come back. He departs, and Tess returns to her bedroom, where she falls to her knees and begins a lamentation. She blames Alec for causing her to lose Angel's love a second time, accusing Alec of having lied when he said that Angel would never return to her. In that harsh argument she stabs Alec to death. Angel, totally disheartened, has left Sandbourne; Tess hurries after him and tells him that she has killed Alec, saying that she hopes she has won his forgiveness by murdering the man who spoiled both their lives. Angel doesn't believe her at first but grants his forgiveness — as she is in such a fevered state — and tells her that he loves her. Rather than head for the coast, they walk inland, vaguely planning to hide somewhere until the search for Tess is ended and they can escape abroad from a port. They find an empty mansion and stay there for five days in blissful happiness, until their presence is discovered one day by the cleaning woman.

They continue walking and, in the middle of the night, stumble upon Stonehenge. Tess lies down to rest on an ancient altar. Before she falls asleep, she asks Angel to look after her younger sister, Liza-Lu, saying that she hopes Angel will marry her after she is dead. At dawn, Angel sees that they are surrounded by policemen. He finally realises that Tess really has committed murder and asks the men in a whisper to let her awaken naturally before they arrest her. When she opens her eyes and sees the police, she tells Angel

“ ‘It is as it should be,’ she murmured. ‘Angel I am almost glad-yes, glad! This happiness could not have lasted. It was too much. I have had enough; and now I shall not live for you to despise me!’”²³



Tess is escorted to Wintoncester (Winchester) prison. The novel closes with Angel and Liza-Lu watching from a nearby hill as the black flag signaling Tess's execution is raised over the prison.

“ ‘Justice’ was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess.”²⁴

Angel and Liza-Lu then join hands and go on their way. Nothing changes out of Tess' death. Life doesn't stop for anybody. This is the extremity of materialism and selfishness. The society which is responsible for the downfall to death of such a young girl suggests no solution for her salvation. It is an irony that the only true fact uttered in the whole novel is said by its villain,

“ I say in all earnestness that it is a shame for parents to bring up their girls in such a dangerous ignorance of gins and nets that the wicked may set for them, whether their motive be good one or the result of simple indifference.”²⁵

So, here is the life of a common girl, full of agonies and insecurity. We still have Tess in our society who pays for someone else's crime. We are responsible for their downfall because we are the society. We made it bias, double-standardized and insecure for women. The whole structure of the so-called civilized world needs to be changed because it is standing upon the ashes of many innocents who lost their lives in the name of honour.

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