

## Thomas Hardy: A Torchbearer of Feminism Representing Sufferings of Victorian Era Women

Nadia Saeed<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Ali Shaikh<sup>2</sup>, Stephen John<sup>3\*</sup>, Kamal Haider<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China

<sup>2</sup>Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi, Pakistan

<sup>3</sup>SMI University, Karachi, Pakistan

<sup>4</sup>Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology, Karachi

**Corresponding Author:** Stephen John, E-mail: [sjohn@smiu.edu.pk](mailto:sjohn@smiu.edu.pk)

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: February 12, 2020

Accepted: April 26, 2020

Published: May 31, 2020

Volume: 9 Issue: 3

Advance access: May 2020

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to highlight the miserable plight of women during the Victorian era, the age of social reforms, political improvements, collective welfare, and material prosperity. During this age, Queen Victoria worked on various issues that had remained the cause of unrest among the people. Her efforts, in this regard, were indeed commendable, but she took no interest to resolve issues of women who had been suffering terribly under patriarchy. The subject of women remained ignored for many years, then some writers started to highlight the miserable state of these passive creatures who were the constant victims of social, political and economic injustices, inequalities, deprivations, and domestic violence. Of all the feminists, Thomas Hardy stood unique as he brought to light almost all areas of life where women were suffering awfully and their voices were suppressed under the male-dominated system. Hardy took serious note of the long-ignored subject of society and provided a vivid and realistic picture of Victorian society through his extraordinarily brilliant novels. Thomas Hardy's famous masterpiece 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman' is one of the best novels depicting women-related issues that shook the minds of the people to proceed towards this delicate matter. The contents or events described in the novel confirmed that women were the disadvantaged section of society who were deprived of their due rights and respect in society. They were objectified and preferred to a man in each sphere of life.

**Key words:** Women Sufferings, Victorian Era, Torchbearer, and Feminism

### INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy is known as feminist who unfolded the condition and demands of women of all social classes in the Victorian era, an age of tremendous advancements and material prosperity in the history of Britain. It was the time when Queen Victoria had worked on several issues that had strained the faith of common people on the royalties. The initiatives taken by the glorious queen bridged the gap between the royalties and the common masses who had lost all their hopes with the rulers. Queen Victoria showed her profound concern with the prosperity of her people and her exceptional interest in political affairs and people's lives brought people and rulers closer and closer. It was the first time in the history of England when people were granted the right to vote that encouraged them to work for national development and social well-being. The era is still remembered as an outstanding period of history for the stupendous transformations whose credit, undoubtedly, goes to the meritorious queen of the time. According to Miller, "The Victorian age was the beginning of modern time." Victorian age witnessed various reforms that are why it is also called "the age of social and political reforms." A few major reforms of this golden era are outlined here:

The First Reform Act (1832) that is also known as the Great Reform was meant to improve the electoral system as people were not happy with the existing system and wanted that to be fair. The Factory Act (1833) was passed to control child labor that had raised to a terrible level. The exploitation of poor children especially orphans was a common practice by the factory owners who would make little children work hard in low wages and would treat them very badly. Besides this, the working conditions in those factories were very pathetic and workers had various issues of hygiene. This law was aimed to facilitate the labors and set rules and regulations that could favor children and workers. Poor Law Amendment (1834) established a system of workhouses for poor people. The Second Reform (1867) Act gave the vote to skilled working men. Trade Union Act (1871) officially recognized trade unions to give them legal protection. The Third Reform Act (1884) granted the right to vote to all male householders. But till 1918 Women's suffrage was a question as women were not supposed to express their opinion in important matters. The most outstanding revolution that is remembered in world history as the "Industrial Revolution" emerged out in the Victorian era. This marvelous revolution

gave rise to the growth of industries and capitalism. The age also witnessed various technological advancements like the invention of the steam engine and the building of railway networks. Britain became the greatest economic power in the world; though in 1901 the USA became the leader, Britain remained the first in manufacturing.

Although the Victorian era was an era of social well-being and economic prosperity, the same had some complexities that were calling for further reforms. The rapid growth of industry, trade, and commerce in the mentioned epoch gave rise to the middle class that constituted skilled professionals and were highly demanded in various sectors to overcome and fulfill the emerging needs. The large scale of new industries such as railroads, banks, and government meant that more labor was needed to make sure the cities were able to function (Loftus). Victorian age was a blessing for the middle class as they were having a lot of job opportunities to enjoy a better and respectable position in society. But at the same time, the working-class people were miserably suffering as they did not know any skill and could do only manual work that had been rejected after the industrial revolution. Most of them were peasants and when lands were mechanized, beautiful landscapes were replaced with factories, they became jobless. They moved to cities to make both ends meet and were relying on minor jobs offered to them by the rich masters. The poverty-stricken women were leading miserable lives because they had no right to have better employment opportunities. Patriarchy, gender inequalities and set standards of gender-roles had deprived women miserably. Though Queen Victoria brought many social and political reforms to facilitate the people and for national interests, she did not consider the rights of women and limited their role to only house-keeping and domestic jobs. Men were responsible to earn for the family and all the important decisions were taken by them. This ignorance on her part became the cause of women's sufferings and miseries that were basically because of the set standards of gender-roles in that time.

We can see the glimpses of Victorian's social, political, and economic scenario in the literature of that time especially in the novels that are the product of the same era. Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, and George Eliot were the famous novelists of the Victorian age who provided the readers with a realistic picture of the time.

Thomas Hardy, the distinguished novelist, social critic, and poet of the Victorian age presented the problems faced by Victorian women that had been constantly ignored under the hollow shades of modernity. As a social critic, Hardy realized the severity of the issue and the downcast state of the naive subjects and addressed it through his literary work. He urged the readers to know what was around the corner and became the voice of these women. He wanted the authorities to take notice of the issue of women's rights. Hardy wrote several novels in which he revealed the condition of women i.e. "Far from the Madding Crowd (1874)", "The Return of the Native (1878)", "The Mayor of Caster bridge (1886)", and "Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman (1891)" etc. He was the torchbearer of feminism in the Victorian era and his female characters were the unheard voice of all Victorian

women who were the innocent victims of brutal modern Victorian values. Hardy's novels depicted the Victorian scenario where readers could see the innocent women living miserable and downtrodden lives in the hidden areas that were not overlooked by the modern gentry. They were deprived, exploited, oppressed by patriarchy, discriminations, and had no right to express their views and word their wretchedness. Hardy portrayed his age so vividly that readers could easily interpret what he meant to advocate without further description.

As it is mentioned that Hardy's female characters were his voice to portray the miserable problems the women were having, of all characters "Tess" was the most outstanding. In this single character, Hardy had weaved all the problems the Victorian women were suffering at the social, political, financial, emotional level. Tess, whom Hardy presented as a simple and innocent peasant girl got exposed to the modern Victorian world where at every step of her unfortunate life she had to bear hardships. Brought up to be passive, enduring, and compromising female, she suffered all hardships to prove herself the true Victorian woman. Her "purity" was targeted, she was deceived, exploited, and disgraced for she was a woman, "a peasant girl" whose worth was nothing more than a puppet in the hands of cruel men dominated society. The socially deprived woman was also ill-treated and rejected by the church authorities because social and religious rights, justice, and privileges were only the inheritance of Victorian men and women had no share in that. Moreover, economically weak or poverty-stricken women were ridiculous folks and were the easy victims of rich and powerful subjects in society. Thomas Hardy had bitterly attacked the cruel social conventions of the Victorian era where women were deprived of subjects. His realistically depicted characters have attracted a large number of readers who appreciated his work and supported his efforts to come up with such a true picture of a society that had not been presented before. At the same time, his writings were attacked by critics for being immoral. He was censored but he didn't stop advocating the subject of women. Once he declared that if he had not written on the subject of Victorian women, that would have been a loss of history. Indeed, Hardy's novels especially his masterpiece *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was a rich commentary on Victorian society. According to Widdowson (1999), Hardy is a widely read intellectual closely familiar with the literary debates of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Thomas Hardy, unlike his contemporary writers, elaborated on the scenario that he witnessed and penned down them for the readers to judge. Shires (1999), in her seminal essay, "The Radical Aesthetic of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*," wrote; "Hardy's texts ask his readers to understand the relativity of their values and judgments. He didn't try to hide as dark aspect rather he boldly brought to light each minute detail artistically. He boldly faced all the criticism of his work and fought for his characters. His realistic approach, strong characters, and artistically weaved scenario or "Scenario Planning" made readers understand the situation easily. Readers could do "Scenario Analysis" without any additional detail.

“Scenario Analysis” and “Scenario Planning” are widely used techniques in different fields of science and art. The term “scenario” was derived from the Latin “*scaena*”, meaning “scene” Ringland, (1998) was originally used in the context of literature; the authors, and playwrights. Sparrow (2000) noted four contemporary uses of the word. One use corresponds to sensitivity analysis, second, as used in military or civil emergency planning, the third sense was also synonymous with a contingency plan but applied to decision-making in corporate or public policy. Sparrow argued that planners advising decision-makers use a fourth interpretation, regarding scenarios as more exploratory so that a scenario was less a strategy and more coherently structured speculation. Godet and Roubelat (1996) expressed that the fourth meaning, given by Sparrow, formed the basis for much of the interest of scenarios for education. Van der Heijden et al., (2002) argued that the word “scenario” has various definitions, but, in all its elaborations, one thing is common i.e., it is not a prediction. An elaborative definition of the term, scenario, was set forth by Van Notten (2005); “Scenarios are consistent and coherent descriptions of alternative hypothetical futures that reflect different perspectives on past, present, and future developments, which can serve as a basis for action. Scenario, in the context of literature, is defined as “an outline of the plot of a dramatic work, giving particulars as to the scenes, characters, situations, etc.” Marcel Proust was of the view that to explore new things we need to change our perspective about the world and the objects and we can do it when we view different happenings in different ways. As per Szasz (1994), a single image can be interpreted in several ways that give our minds a new dimension to create something new. Hardy’s artistically planned scenarios are still helping out readers for multiple interpretations. All actions, in Hardy’s novels, were connected so artfully that each incident unfolded the history of the Victorian era. His novel, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* was the best work in which readers could find a well-woven plot through a realistic reflected scenario.

The story of the novel, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, revolved around Tess, the protagonist, and her struggle with Alec and Angel Clare. Tess, a simple peasant girl, the eldest child of a poverty-stricken family, went out to give financial support to her family. She was sent for d’Urbervilles’ mansion by her greedy parents who were over-excited that their days of poverty and misery were going to be finished and Tess was going to make fortune for them. They did not warn her to be careful of the situations she was going to face. Her simple mother didn’t advise her to beware of wicked men like Alec. Though, she was not willing to go, realizing her responsibility that she was responsible for the death of Prince, the only source of income for her poor family she could not stop herself. At d’Urbervilles’ mansion, she was welcomed by wicked Alec who believed that money was everything and money could buy anything. It was the common privilege that the rich Victorians would avail that “If you are rich, you can do anything you want.” He, at his first glance, started exploiting the simple peasant girl and offered her the job of looking after the fowls of her blind mother. Tess accepted this job and started working to support her family. But Alec

kept on taking advantage of her, and Tess could just keep on resisting his wickedness. Being simple maiden, she didn’t know how to keep off bastards like Alec but she did her best to save herself from the evil intentions of the wicked man. One day, taking the advantage, Alec seduced her and left her pregnant. Like traditional Victorian women, Tess did not raise her voice against him and decided to leave silently. She left her job and came to her parents where she gave birth to Alec’s son “Sorrow” who could not live long and died soon.

Tess went out for Talbothays dairy farm to work for herself and her family. In the new journey of her unfortunate life, she met Angel Clare and they fell in love. They got married but this relationship didn’t bring any happiness to Tess, rather this added to her miseries. Though Angel Clare was a broad-minded man, when he learned Tess’s past related to Alec, he could not resist that. He rejected her and abandoned her mercilessly. The helpless woman, once again collected her strengths to struggle through poverty. Fortune, once again, deceived her by making her meet Alec, the person who was responsible for Tess’s rejection by Angel Clare. Alec proposed her to marry him and promised to support her and her family. He also convinced her that Angel would not come back. Though she was still in love with Angel, Tess had no option. Her father had died and her family was homeless. She accepted Alec’s proposal though she still hated him and anything he would offer her like ever. Fortune took another side to add misery to Tess’s life when Angel came back. She held Alec responsible for this for he had made his mind just for his wild lust. She couldn’t resist anymore, she killed him and escaped with Angel. But, she could not escape her fate, the cruel laws that were always against women. Alec’s murder was treated very differently from the death of innocent Sorrow who was buried in the darkness of night as an act of shame. His murder was investigated and he was arrested by police at Stonehenge. She was trailed and sentenced to death to implement justice. That was how “a peasant girl” was exploited, mutilated, and humiliated and destroyed in a mechanized and capitalist culture. Kettle (1954) argued that although “the subject of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is stated clearly by Hardy to be the fate of a ‘pure woman’; it is the destruction of the English peasantry” (49).

## DISCUSSION

Hardy’s novels were placed in different categories. He included *Tess of d’Urbervilles* in “Character and Environment Novels.” In the image of Tess, we could see a modern woman suffering from the old moral persecution. Tess, a girl from a peasant family, had a typical significance in exposing and accusing the whole system at that time but she kept her old simple, moral and fatalistic ideas. Because of her simple and submissive nature, she could not defend herself when she was persecuted by public opinion and traditional morality. She regarded herself as guilty and couldn’t forget her shame more than anyone else. As it is written in the novel; “Once a victim, always victim—that’s the law!” (336). Tess herself had submitted herself to society to accuse her guilty. Hardy revealed a very harsh reality of a Victorian society where it was useless for a woman to raise her voice for justice. Hardy

had highlighted the dark side of modernity as Shires (1999) viewed, "*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is not only the richest novel that Hardy ever wrote, it is also the culmination of a long series of Victorian texts which identify, enact, and condemn the alienated condition of modernity" (159).

Victorian women were disadvantaged socially, politically, and economically. In each sphere of life, they were deprived. Thomas Hardy had depicted the deprivations, sufferings, and miseries of women through Tess. He connected one incident with another so realistically that a reader could have the whole picture of Victorian society in his mind. Riquelme (1998) wrote; "Tess has been a significant stimulus to thinking about cultural values, both moral and aesthetic" (389). He gathered a vast amount of Marxist, materialist, and feminist literary analysis of Tess from the 1950s through to the 1990s. He described how "intense energy has gone into feminist interpretations of Hardy, including centrally Tess. It is unlikely that any other male author writing in English has attracted more attention from feminist critics, a great deal of it thoughtful and positive" (400).

### **Economic and Politically Sufferings**

After the accidental death of Prince, the family horse that was the only source of a family's income, Tess had to work to support her family. Meanwhile, the family received a letter from the d'Urbervilles asking for Tess's services in the mansion to look after the fowls. She could not look after fowls as she said to her mother, 'But I don't know that I am apt at tending fowls' (59). She further said, 'I don't altogether think I ought to go' (59). The task she was going to perform was new to her and she was not willing to go there. But her mother convinced her putting all the assumed expectations into the mind of the innocent girl that she had with the d'Urbervilles, as she said; 'Mr. d'Urbervilles says you must be a good girl if you are at all as you appear; he knows you must be worth your weight in gold. He is very much interested in 'ee—truth to tell' (60). Tess became happy to listen to the vague assumptions of her mother that had no reality in them. She accepted the job of fowl tending to give financial support to her family who in her view would be going to suffer because of her as she held herself responsible for the accidental death of their family horse. This is how an innocent girl was sent to a world that was unknown to her, where everything was new to the simple village lass who was brought up to endure and compromise.

Thomas Hardy highlighted economic injustice with women in Victorian society that was all in all male-dominated society. Women were deprived of their economic right to suitable and better employment opportunities. They were treated as inferior creatures having no will of their own. Hardy, being a feminist, advocated the right of women for they should have their own identity and respectable status in society. Thomas Hardy also presented the dilemma of the poor girl, Tess how she suffered because of the ignorance and prejudices of her parents. They had a lot of expectations from the d'Urbervilles, the rich family. When they received a letter in which it was written that Tess's services were needed to them to look after their fowls, they didn't investigate

the matter. They were very happy and feeling pride that their daughter was going to serve a family that was, respectable because they were rich. Though Tess was not willing to go there, she compromised for the sake of her family and sacrificed to maintain the misconceptions of her parents. Through Tess Hardy depicted the miseries of Victorian women how they would be objectified politically and emotionally to surrender their free will. Hardy also portrayed the real picture of the society where the rich were looked up to as respectable and honorable without any merit of their own. Hardy attacked this attitude and tried to open the eyes of the authorities.

Alec, the hypocrite monstrous ghost of the modern Victorian age, exploited, mistreated, and dominated Tess during her services. This cruel master wanted Tess to stay submissive to him as he was her master and could do whatever he wanted. Tess kept on resisting his wickedness but one day this devilish monster took advantage of her helplessness. He victimized her to satisfy his wild lust. He seduced her and left her pregnant. The simple "The Maiden" was "Maiden No More" After this tragic incident, Tess could not continue her job that she was doing to support her poor family. Hardy attacked the rules of nobility practiced in a Victorian society where women had no respect at all and men would do whatever they wanted. Women were suppressed physically, politically, economically, and emotionally in society. There was no justice for them and no law that could ensure their security. Through Tess, Hardy had depicted the dilemma of all the women of that time who had been suffering without fault of their own. Expressing the miserable plight of Victorian Women Hardy wrote; "Let the truth be told—women do as a rule live through such humiliations, and regain their spirits, and again look about them with an interested eye" (149-50). This statement indicated that Victorian women were helpless under patriarchy and would go through tortures and humiliation without complaint. They were compromising and the object of constant mortification in society. Hardy also unmasked the evil nature, hypocrisy, and wickedness of the so-called Victorian gentry through Alec.

After the tragic incident, when the poor girl came back to her parents' house, they were unhappy with her as she had brought disgrace to them in society. As her mother said, 'You ought to have been more careful if you didn't mean to get him to make you his wife' (117). Hardy exposed the blind justice prevailing in the Victorian age where women were oppressed in the name of family honor. The issue of Tess was not investigated to save Alec, a wealthy, influential, and so-called respectable Victorian. Hardy attacked the fake moral concept of morality among Victorians where men and women were treated with discrimination. He highlighted how women were condemned and men were saved.

### **Social/religious Sufferings**

Religion has a very important role in an individual's life for it serves as guiding rules for man and religious places are refuges where people can retire themselves from all worldly restrictions and can find peace. In Hardy's novel, religion is one of the dominant themes as in Victorian-era religion has lost its true essence. He has strongly criticized the

superficiality of Victorians' religious beliefs and their lack of spirituality. Describing the lack of spiritual knowledge and limited perception of Victorian man, Hardy writes; "His eyes were equally barren of worldly and religious faith" (463).

Hardy attacked the church authorities that were devoid of true spirituality. Their faith was shattered and they were unable to help out people. People had left to attend the churches because of religious biases.

After being exploited by Alec and rejected by her parents, Tess was constantly tormented because of her ugly past and horrible future troubles that she had to face everything all alone. As Hardy wrote; "In place of the excitement of her return, and the interest it had inspired, she saw before her a long and stony highway which she had to tread, without aid, and with little sympathy" (119). She visited her friends and neighborhood but nothing could console her. Emotionally oppressed, she took the way to church thinking she might find peace of her mind. But she just met disappointment there as the visitors were just whispering and speaking critically about her. As was mentioned in the novel; "The people who had turned their heads turned them again as the service proceeded; and at last observing her, they whispered to each other. She knew what their whispers were about, grew sick at heart, and felt that she could come to church no more"(120-121).

Hardy highlighted the helplessness and disappointments of Victorian women; and the attitude of the visitors at church. Everyone was critical without sharing a single word of sympathy with her and without bothering to ask her about the culprit who was responsible for her miserable state. They had their judgments to declare a woman as "a pure woman" or "a fallen woman." As per their laws, the helpless and victimized Tess was "a fallen woman." Hardy censored the churches and social institutions where authorities and stakeholders were guided by their set criteria for the judgment of people. He was of the view that people should be judged by their intentions not by their as he mentioned through Angel Clare who asked himself; "who was the moral woman?" and concluded that "[t]he beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay, not among things done, but among things willed" (421). This religious corruption was one of the severe causes of widespread social evils in Victorian society. Religious institutions were not much powerful to use their authorities to restrict people with a wealthy background in promoting immorality.

At church, Tess met a young sign painter who was painting some texts related to sin, adultery, and damnation. During her conversation with the artisan, Tess asked him a question regarding the texts that he was painting. He could not provide a satisfactory answer to Tess's query, then she put another question for her better understanding expecting this might console her. The questioning irritated the young painter and instead of answering Tess gently, he spoke harshly; "I cannot split hairs on that burning query"(114).

This statement reflects that church authorities were, all in all, devoid of spiritual knowledge and wisdom to help out suffering souls. They had no interest to know the

interpretations of the biblical texts, rather they just believed in spreading the texts and that was, according to them, was their duty as a religious person. The young artisan told Tess; 'I have walked hundreds of miles this past summer, painting these taxes on every wall, gate, and stile the length and breadth of this district. I leave their application to the hearts of the people who read 'em' (114). This statement indicated the irony of the church authorities who would terrify people rather than making them understand the religion and implement their understanding in daily lives. Religion preaches to be thoughtful and not to do and say anything without complete knowledge and understanding of the matters. Visitors at the church had no sympathy for the poor lady, Tess, who had been suffering badly because of the sin that was not her own. She had simple unsophisticated religious thoughts that she would practice with full devotion. She had no intention to indulge in the severe guilt she was condemned for. Alec was responsible for her misery and she was just bearing the burden of that beast's sin on her physically weak but spiritually strong self. As Hardy writes; "Never in her life—she could swear it from the bottom of her soul—had she ever intended to do wrong, yet these hard judgments had come. Whatever her sins, they were not sins of intention, but inadvertence, and why should she have been punished so persistently" (509)?

Here, Hardy exposed how Victorians looked at women, how the weak creatures would be tortured and oppressed after they were victimized by the corrupt gentry. They were disgraced, left alone mercilessly to deal with all the cruelties. Hardy shook the minds of people to be rational in their judgments. Instead of punishing innocent girls for their unintentional guilt, they needed to target the real culprits.

Time passed on and Tess gave birth to a baby whom she named 'Sorrow.' Nobody was happy at the birth of the unfortunate whom Hardy ironically wrote, "the Undesired" and "bastard gift of shameless Nature, who respects not the social law." (136) Unlike other Christian children in England, Sorrow was not baptized as Mr. John, Tess's father, was afraid that the news of this unnatural happening would affect his honor and respect in society. He did not allow the local parson to come to baptize the child. This was an indication of the extreme cruelty of the Victorian society, even people had no sympathy for an innocent child and helpless mother. Like his chaste mother, her innocent child was also suffering because of the sin of his father, Alec and society was altogether to punish both the innocent and weak creatures who were very easy to be humiliated and cursed unlike strong and wealthy Alec, the real culprit. Hardy depicted this harsh reality of a Victorian society where the poor and the weak were the objects of humiliation while whatever the rich and the powerful would do that used to be considered as the norm.

One day, Sorrow fell severely ill, and Tess's motherly affection made her think again and again that her child was suffering as he was not baptized. For the salvation of her child, she had to perform this act to Christianize her baby who, like his unfortunate mother, was a societal abuse. Tess did this very magnificently as while she was performing the act, she was not looking less than a clergyman who performs

this act in front of a person. As Hardy wrote in the novel; “Tess then stood erect with the infant on her arm beside the basin, the next sister held the Prayer-Book open before her, as the clerk at church held it before the parson; and thus the girl set about baptizing her child” (134).

Hardly made Tess to perform this religious act to attack the Victorian patriarchy that would administer the churches. Being pious and chaste, the clergyman would perform certain religious acts like baptism. People used to look up to them with hopes and expectations; and they were highly admired for rendering their services. But the Victorian churches were biased with women and they were not using their authority to curb the anti-religious practices that had become the usual norm of society. Tess’s father deprived her innocent children to be baptized out of his Victorian pride but the church authorities were null and void. Tess, like a clergyman, performed the act of christening her son. Hardy made Tess baptize her child that was the most praiseworthy action in the novel. While she performed the act, she was reflecting unusual light that was the glow and attraction of her purity and innocence that the cruel society had rejected for their fake standards of honor and value. As it was written in the novel; “The ecstasy of faith almost apotheosized her; it set upon her face a glowing irradiation, and brought a red spot into the middle of each cheek; while the miniature candle-flame inverted in her eye pupils shone like a diamond” (136). Hardy leveled that real purity is the purity of intentions or inner purity that reflects souls while self-created images of purity and innocence are all fake. Hardy tried to convince the people with conventional beliefs and the slaves of the socially set biased conventions to learn to identify the application of sincere expressions of faith as demonstrated by Tess. The truth of faith is judged by the intentions of people regardless of any other thing. The real purity is the purity of heart.

At last, Sorrow was baptized elegantly unlike other Christian children, but the little unfortunate creature could not live anymore to resist the societal injustice and died. As Hardy wrote; “So passed away Sorrow the Undesired—that intrusive creature, that bastard gift of shameless Nature, who respects not the social law” (136).

Sorrow was an unwanted child who was condemned by society as “the Undesired.” Each child comes in this mortal world as innocent for he has nothing to do with sin, but this innocent child was treated differently because his birth was unwanted and his death was meaningless for society. He was neither a Christian nor a human rather, he was just the product of sin. Thomas Hardy highlighted the extreme cruelty that had become everyday practice in Victorian society.

Tess’s act of baptizing her child for his salvation was a very praiseworthy action and she deserved to be praised and respected for the extraordinary courage she demonstrated, but the biased social and religious laws and narrow-minded church authorities disappointed her by saying that her son was not baptized because a woman did not hold authoritative for such a dignified deed. Distressed after the death of her child, Tess was struggling for a proper Christian burial for him. She went to the parson and told him that she, herself, had baptized her child and asked if he could allow him

a proper religious burial that he denied. As it was written in the novel; “The man and the ecclesiastic fought within him, and the victory fell to the man.” (pg:137) Hardy revealed how women were humiliated and rejected in all institutions in Victorian society. Her child was first deprived of Christianizing then proper Christian burial for he was taken as unbaptized. Tess pressed her point, further challenging the Parson on church doctrine that the unbaptized are not accorded a proper Christian burial, he denied supporting his refusal in the light of existing church doctrines. As Hardy wrote; “I would willingly do so if only we two are concerned. But I must not — for certain reasons” (138). Hardy condemned the church authorities and biased social laws that were all in all against women. This attitude of the church authorities was the cause of religious fragmentation and people had lost their faith in religion and attend churches. As Tess finally told the priest: “Then I don’t like you ... and I’ll never come to your church again” (138).

Sorrow was buried in a nearly forgotten part of the church graveyard, where, as per Hardy “unbaptized infants, notorious drunkards, suicides, and others of the conjecturally damned are laid” (138). That was how Hardy depicted the extremely miserable plight of Victorian society to shake their minds.

Tess, once again, went out to continue to work for herself and her family. Her new beginning at Talbothays Dairy Farm was a new struggle with a new man Angel Clare, the son of parson James Clare. Angel was a praiseworthy character in the novel. He was a broadminded man and reflected a different mindset. He liked the simplicity and chastity in Tess and fell in love with her. Tess also liked his gentle mannerism and practical approach in looking at things. Tess was happy to have a man like Angel who would replace her sad life with happiness. But soon after marriage, Angel and Tess confess their evil past that turned the table for both. Angel confesses her affair with a lady and Tess also confessed her mutilated past. Though Tess forgave him, Angel couldn’t resist the truth. The image of Tess that he had imagined in his mind had shattered. Out of Tess’s expectations, he reacted like an ordinary Victorian man. He weighted Tess guiltier than himself.

As he said; “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—premeditation as that!” (329). He, too, disgraced her by humiliating remarks and left her. Once again, Tess had to suffer not for the sin of her own.

Hardy revealed the male-dominated and gender-biased Victorian practices more intensely by presenting the struggle of Tess with Angel. Both the characters had the same past, Angel’s confess was praiseworthy and Tess’s act of forgiving the affair was outstandingly admirable. But, Tess confess was treated differently by Angel. For her sincere and honest confess, she was oppressed by patriarchy. She remained a disadvantage as ever. Once again, she was all alone to suffer the miseries of her desolate life and there was before her” a long and stony highway which she had to tread, without aid” (117). Though, later on, Angel regretted and came back

to her, that was too late as Alec had appeared, again like a devil to take advantage of her wretchedness.

Alec persuaded Tess to marry him as he had enough money to support her and her family though he knew that Tess was married to Angel Clare and loved him. He exploited her feelings and persuaded her to believe that Angel would not back. Once again he took advantage of her helplessness and poverty. He exercised his powerful financial status on her. This was obvious from his words when he said; "Remember, my lady, I was your master once! I will be your master again" (336).

Hardy presented Alec as a destroyer who treated Tess as an object and his possession. He always suppressed her and dominated her and never considered her a human. Hardy attacked the Victorian standards where women had low status and were treated as inferior creatures. Commenting on Alec, Ian Gregory wrote, "Alec's world, the world of the Stoke-D'Urbervilles, is inseparable from nineteenth-century laissez-faire capitalism, it is the triumph of the individual bourgeois ethic, what is wanted can be bought" (192).

## CONCLUSION

Thomas Hardy is true 'the torchbearer of feminism in the Victorian Age' because he, of all feminists, stood unique in his representation of female related problems that had become a matter of serious consideration by the authorities. Tess of d'Urbervilles, the masterpiece of Hardy is an exceptional literary work in which he exposed all the sufferings of Victorian women through his distinguished character, Tess. He has portrayed Tess so magnificently that it gives readers a complete picture of miseries and hardships that the women of the Victorian age were going through. In Tess, Hardy intricate extraordinary compromising spirit, one of the most liked women attributes, became the cause of her tragic circumstances again and again in her life. Like traditional Victorian women, who used to be taught to stay calm and submissive to be the symbol of chastity, Tess went through all troubles in her life. She resisted Alec's wickedness, hypocrisy, abided social laws and conventions, and stayed submissive. She could not revolt against the social injustice and laws that suppressed women everywhere and advantaged men. Hardy had presented Tess to expose the social, political, and emotional

injustice of the time. He has done this so artfully that his voice of feminism could reach everywhere.

## REFERENCES

- Godet M. and Roubelat F. (1996). *Creating the Future: The Use and Misuse of Scenario*. Long Range Planning. Vol. 29, pp. 164-171
- Gregor, Ian. (1974) *The Great Web*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Heijden V. et al. (2002). Scenario Planning: Taking Charge of the Future. The Sixth Sense: Accelerating Organizational Learning with Scenarios. Wiley.com. [https://books.google.com.pk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=uEz7CAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA229&dq=Van+der+Heijden+et+al.,+\(2002&ots=8Bcc21dCb-C&sig=prWn6cEQP3fO-WRfYXmfX3T4Htg#v=onepage&q=Van%20der%20Heijden%20et%20al.%2C%20\(2002&f=false](https://books.google.com.pk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=uEz7CAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA229&dq=Van+der+Heijden+et+al.,+(2002&ots=8Bcc21dCb-C&sig=prWn6cEQP3fO-WRfYXmfX3T4Htg#v=onepage&q=Van%20der%20Heijden%20et%20al.%2C%20(2002&f=false)
- Kettle, A. (1954) *An Introduction to The English Novel Vol. II*. New York: Hutchinson.
- Ringland, G (1998). *Scenario Planning: Managing for the Future*. John Wiley & Sons: New York
- Riquelme, John Paul, (1998). *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism: Thomas Hardy Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Boston: Bedford.
- Shires, Linda M. (1999) "The Radical Aesthetic of Tess of the d'Urbervilles." The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy. Ed. Dale Kramer. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge.
- Sparrow, M.F. (2000). *Toward A Theology of Ordinary Life. Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/106385120000900105>. Retrieved on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2019.
- Szasz, T. (1994). *Cruel Compassion: Psychiatric Control of society's unwanted*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Van Notten, Ph. W. F. (2005). *Writing on the Wall: Scenario Development in Times of Discontinuity*. Dissertation, [www.dissertation.com](http://www.dissertation.com).
- Widdowson, P (1999). "Hardy and Critical Theory." The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy. Ed. Dale Kramer. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge.