

## Chapter – IX

# Tess of the D'urbervilles

In Tess of D'urbervilles Hardy represents an innocent, inexperienced woman whom the society violates sexually, turns into a 'fallen woman' and finally giving her the blame of a murderer hangs her. The society Tess faces is a dehumanized agrarian society where the human relationships have been cruelly distorted with the advent of mechanized agriculture. This society determines the worth of a woman by the double-standard of sexual morality. The sexual fall of a woman is judged by the society as something unpardonable. The so-called 'purity' is demanded only from women and men are never asked to keep their purity. Any woman who fails to satisfy the conventional morality of the society is denied a place in the society. Such women are easy games for the male members and prostitution was the only way open to them. Hardy has defended the innocence and purity of Tess while exposing the spurious sexual morality and aggressive sexuality of the patriarchal society. In his previous novels Hardy defends the subversive roles of the heroines rather tactfully. In Tess Hardy directly comes to represent a woman who openly comes to clash with the male-dominated society. Being unaware of the crooked ways of the masculinist society , Tess apparently falls from her so-called purity. But her unintentional 'fall' cannot undermine her indomitable spirit and courage. She continues her fight against the odds that lay before her and tries to attain fulfillment. The false codes of morality fails to destroy her courageous soul as she strives to define her personality in a new way. But the inexorable forces of the society resist her attempts to find a place in the society and her 'past' haunts her wherever she goes. Taking the church rituals and the law in her own hands she strikes at the exclusionary ideology of male dominated society. Tess's personality attains a rare combination of sexuality and spirituality at the same time with her confrontational nature. Ready to perform her duties she 'sells' her body for her family members, but she remains untouched by the filth. Finally when she asserts herself and kills her sexual degrader the society terms her a 'murderess'. And hangs her. Tess embraces death rather than compromise with the discriminating values of the

society. In no other novel, does Hardy come forward so openly to attack the conventional values and double-standard of sexual morality for projecting heroine's integrity and honesty. Tess's death becomes a moral triumph over the hypocrite, gender-discriminating society.

Since her appearance in the novel Hardy stresses on Tess's physicality. When the novel opens Tess is seen participating in May-day celebration, a worn - out local custom. Wearing a white - frock, taking a peeled willow in hand Tess takes part in local ceremony along with other village girls. She can be easily singled out from the rest of her friends due to her vital physicality. Hardy here primarily focuses on her 'bouncing handsome womanliness (Tess of the D'urbervilles, 13, henceforth cited as TD). Hardy informs: "She had an attribute which amounted to disadvantage" (TD, 47) and it is this that causes 'Alec d'urbervilles eyes to rivet upon her It was'a luxuriance of aspect, a fullness of growth' (TD 48). Tess is conspicuous in the procession of the village girls due to "her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes" (TD, 12). Hardy's representational fascination with Tess's body raises many awkward questions. But Hardy being determined to release Victorian women from the conventional mode of representation imparts Tess a flesh and blood reality. Tess that is represented by Hardy is not a sexless, submissive and soft feminine figure. But a woman with beauty, and an exceptional physical energy. With her extreme physical vigour, Tess stands out as one of the most radical woman in the contemporary literature.

Hardy contests the conventional code of representation of women that stresses a sexually passive and physically weak figure. Hardy demolishes the traditional ideas about women sexuality. Representing Tess with her strong physical presence in the novel Hardy conveys that Tess defies any stereotypical model of womanhood.

Hardy's bold representation of Tess also reveals the fact of erotic desire in man that is activated by female beauty. The contemporary discourse on femininity underlines that a woman having any form of sexual manifestation is an improper woman. Female sexuality posed a threat to

Victorian social structure. It often terms vital sexuality in woman as primitive, and threatening. The society projectes woman in terms of conceptual bifurcation-Madonna or a Whore. Hardy castigates society's conception of femininity. Women are shown either as full of physicality or sexless entity. Hardy exposes this contradictory attitude to woman sexuality through two male figures - Alec and Angel. Alec's vision of Tess as only a sexual object and Angel's idealised vision of her denies her rights as a human being.

In exploring the ways by which Tess is victimised by the 'distorted male gaze', Hardy also exposes the roles of socio-economic factors that perpetuate her oppression and subordination. Tess is victimised since her childhood for being a woman and for belonging to a marginalised peasant family. Her parents belong to a class only above the farm labours. With the advent of mechanised agriculture and organised market economy, this D'urbervilles family has lost its relevance in the Capitalist social relations of productions and is reduced to hagglers. The D'urbvervilles family is expelled from its home to make way for industrial movement. Tess is born in a poverty striken peasant family which has nothing but its labour to sell. Tess's problem becomes doubly oppressive as she is born in a peasant class and she is a woman. We find that Tess's oppression takes the form of both class and gender based oppression. As Anne Z. Mickelson observes:

Pervasive to the novel's materials is the background of Victorian society. Tess is part of a class - conscious society which regards the peasant as an inferior member of society and woman as inferior to man. Tess's duty is laid out for her from cradle to grave - submission and obedience to parents, then to husband, and always to society. As a peasant woman, Tess must work, which she does for most of her brief life. Yet, though she is a functioning member of the economy and the breadwinner in her family. Victorian society demands that she obediently turn over her earnings to her feckless father, thus making her economically dependent . . . As a field worker, she can expect her wages to be lower than those of the man working alongside her. If she marries a man of her own class, she will have to bear many children with little respite from hard physical work in the fields (Mickelson: 1976, 107)

Like Ethelberta, Tess is burdened with the responsibilities of a dozen of her brothers and sisters. Setting aside her aspiration of becoming a teacher she is forced to act like a surrogate father to the little children of the D'urbervilles family. We find extremely tired Tess on her way to Casterbridge with her brother Abraham, who becomes drowsy. She lets him go to sleep thinking that she can take upon herself the entire conduct of the load. She falls more deeply into reverie than ever. Tess's cart is pierced by a morning mail cart. Hardy makes it clear that Tess is deprived of the benefit of sleep. After the day's hard manual work and tending her brothers and sisters and after bringing her drunk father from the inn, when she goes to bed it is eleven o' clock. Tess is awakened at midnight to take part in transporting the beehives to Casterbridge market because of drunkenness of her father. It is very natural that Tess becomes a prey to reverie while driving the cart and when her cart is pierced by the morning mail - cart, we cannot hold Tess responsible for this accident. As Anne Z. Mickelson aptly observes:

Dreams are the refuge of the isolated and the alienated. The young Tess is terribly isolated because she aspires to rise above the squalid life about her. Forced to give up her aspirations to become a school teacher, she occasionally takes comfort in dreams, as later in the degrading life at Flint-Comb-Ash she attempts to insulate herself against her environment by singing ballads to herself Dreams and ballad singing are her sublimation for the denial of ambition and hope. But day dreams never replace reality for her as they sometimes do for Eustacia Vye (RN) (Mickelson, 1976, 110).

Tess, a Victorian woman, is burdened with the ideas of self-sacrifice, duty to family and sense of responsibility. Being conditioned by the Victorian ideology she looks upon herself as responsible for the starvation of her family and for the death of the family horse Prince. Tess thinks herself responsible for what happens. "Tis all my doing - all mine!... No excuse for me - none" (TD, 36). She surrenders to her mother's wishes saying, "Do what you like mother" (TD, 36). Economic necessity of the D'urbervilles family forces Tess to take up the job of tending fowls at Alec'D'urberville's farm. Killing her inner aspiration of becoming of a teacher she degrades herself to a labourer. Hardy

has explicitly shown here Tess's victimisation by the ideology of family responsibility.

Hardy has shown Tess's stern refusal at the suggestion of her mother to mould herself to attract Alec D'urbervilles. Tess, born with innate nobility of character, thinks it beneath her dignity to act according to her mother's wishes. She cannot subscribe to her mother's view that women are born to trap men as husbands. As Anne Z. Mickelson says: "Joan's attempts to use her daughter's beauty are not in the line of that wisdom which for centuries tried to evade by various ruses the seigneur's "right" to the most beautiful of village virgins. Tess's uneasy arguments to her parents concerning the trip to the d'Urbervilles is proof of her strong woman wisdom and instinct... . Above all, she wants no part of that thinking which sees woman only as a sexual object" (Mickelson, 1976: 115).

Hardy bitterly criticises the values of the Victorian society that considers women as sexual objects. He clearly points out that a woman is judged by the double-standard of that society. A woman when she falls by the standard of the society is termed as fallen. But the society blatantly ignores the misdemeanour of a man. As Joseph Allen Boone says : 'Hardy underlines the economic correlatives of sexual power; it is concern for her family's financial situation upon Prince's death, after all, that has brought Tess within Alec's orbit' ( Boone:1997, 109 ) Alec's sexual manipulation of Tess triggers her degradation and execution. The manner in which Alec sexually harasses Tess 'attests to the ideological and psychological inequities buried in a cultural standard of male superiority' (Boone: 1997, 101) . Mickelson says: 'Alec's sexual dominance over Tess is depicted by Hardy symbolically with her ride down a steep, mile-long incline in Alec d'Urberville's dog cart'. (Mickelson: 1976, 109).

When they reach a long, steep descent and Alec drives recklessly, Tess in her alarm clings to Alec. She expresses her anger for driving recklessly but ultimately submits to Alec's "Kiss of mastery" (TD, 65). Reaching another steep descent Alec demands from Tess another kiss, but

this time Tess does not yield to Alec's lustful desire. As H.M.Daleski observes: 'Her eyes light up 'in defiant triumph' at this point. In the power struggle that is joined between them on this ride, Tess shows her capacity for resistance and demonstrating that she can take a stand, she walks rest of the ways" (Daleski, 1987, 157-58).

It is no wonder that Tess is soon raped sexually. As Boone observes: "Accordingly, narrative movement becomes the province of the male figure, who expends his libidinal energies in devising multiple stratagems, and therefore creating more and more "plot" till his desire-- the deflowering and breaking of his victims will - is attained" (Boone: 1997, 100). We are informed by the narrator that Alec d'Urbervilles is a spurious aristocrat and bought the title with money. To Tess's eye the newly erected mansion of Stoke d'Urbervilles does represent something unusual in this part of the country. Tess finds that Alec and his family are an "unusual find . . . . in such an old-fashioned part of the country" (TD, 43). Alec is shown to have a "swarthy complexion" with touches of sexual mastery over inexperienced Tess. The scene in which Alec pushes strawberry into Tess's mouth foreshadows imminent sexual violation of Tess in the 'Chase episode'.

In the 'Chase' episode a deeply tired Tess fall asleep. We know when the mail cart killed Prince she fell into sleep. This falling asleep at the most crucial moments of her life shows that she is extremely tired due to her physical exhaustion. Hardy does not describe Tess's violation literally. He figuratively conveys it:

Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith ? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tisbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked (TD, 90-91).

It was known to Hardy that Victorian readers would be offended by an explicit account of Alec's actions on the fateful night at 'Chase'. When Hardy

wrote this novel the words that conveyed sexual images were censored. So Hardy tells : "Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man; many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order" (TD, 91). Sexual violation forces Tess to give up control over her body. She is imposed upon with involuntary, undesired motherhood, bereavement, and anxieties of a mother. As Susan Brownmiller comments:

It is sexual violence and specifically rape and the threat of rape, which gives men control over women. All women suffer from this, even if they are not the victims of actual rape - because they are all the victims of the threat of rape. It is this fear generated by the threat of rape that keeps women subordinated. Conversely, all men benefit from the fact of rape, even if they are not perpetrators of rape themselves - because the system of rape keeps all women fearful and subordinated to men . . . Rape is not about individual acts of male violence but about a system of male control of women . . . (Quoted in Freedman, 2002, 66 67).

In contrast to earlier writers, Hardy comes forward radically to defend 'fallen women' in Tess. When Tess returns home she is 'Maiden No More'. Tess was a 'Maiden' at the beginning of the novel. But by the conventional standard of the society she is impure as she has lost her chastity. Hardy argues that Tess's action cannot be judged by the traditional morality. Presenting Tess as un-chaste, a murderer, and a prostitute, Hardy comes to confront the conventional concept of purity. Though Hardy defends Tess's purity he is forced to add the subtitle "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented" to please the Grundyist critics. Hardy has shown explicitly that Tess remains untouched by the new values of industrial civilisation that were gradually engulfing traditional 'folk culture' and folk wisdom. To quote Anne Z. Mickelson: "It is certainly true that Tess would have avoided some of her problems had she subscribed to her parents' way of thinking. But the implication that the Durbeyfield's and the other Marlott rustics represent an excellent folk wisdom is not true. It is Tess who embodies those sturdy virtues

which Van Ghent refers to as tenacious and instinctual-virtues which her parents have lost" (Mickelson, 1976, 115).

Tess refuses to accept the feeling of guilt due to her sexual lapse. She resists the attempt of the society to classify her as a 'fallen woman' and thinks: "Was once lost always lost really true of chastity?" (TD 126). Tess is invested with the lust for life and the recuperative power. Here Tess's presentation radically differs from other fallen women in literature. Ruth, Helty Sorel, and Ida Starr are overburdened with guilt ridden psyches that they carry with them till their death. Their sense of guilt prevents them from sharing the joys of life. But Tess is shown with vitality and energy and she enjoys the life around her.

Determined to assert Tess's purity and innocence, Hardy devises the baptism scene. As Rosemarie Morgan says, "In the baptism sequence we are invited to perceive something of her powers of spiritual regeneration, her capacity to utter herself new and free from guilt" (Morgan: 1988; 100). Tess defiantly takes to religious rites and challenges the conventional Christianity by taking the task of baptising. Hardy's emotional involvement with the heroine is explicit when Tess assumes the role of a Christian priest. As Hardy informs:

Her figure looked singularly tall and imposing as she stood in her long white nightgown, a thick cable of twisted dark hair hanging straight down her back to her waist. The kindly dimness of the weak candle abstracted from her form and features the little blemishes which sunlight might have revealed - the stubble scratches upon her enthusiasm having a transfiguring effect upon the face which had been her undoing, showing it as a thing of immaculate beauty, with a touch of dignity which was almost regal (TD, 119).

Hardy emphasises on Tess's 'form and features the little blemishes' (TD,119) His narration takes into account her physical reality - 'the stubble scratches upon her wrists and the weariness of her eyes',(ibid) She with her long whitegown is a towering figure to the little audience. Tess takes the task of baptizing her little child:

'SORROW, I baptize thee in the name of Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Ghost'.

She sprinkled the water, and there was silence.

Say 'Amen' children'.

The tiny voices piped in obedient response 'Amen'!

Tess went on :

'We receive this child' - and so forth - 'and so sign him -  
with the sign of other Cross'.

Here she dipped her hand into the basin and fervently draw an immense cross upon the baby with her forefinger, continuing with the customary sentences as to his manfully fighting against sin, the world, and the devil and being a faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end. She duly went on with Lord's Prayer, the children lisping it after her in a thin gnat like wail, till, at the conclusion, raising their voices to clerk's pitch, they again piped into the silence, 'Amen!' (TD, 19-20).

Hardy vindicates 'fallen' Tess in this midnight baptism scene. Tess's spiritual superiority to the conventional religion has been established. Rosemarie Morgan rightly notes: "An emblematic rite, baptism objectifies sin and guilt and enacts the release of the force of darkness. Tess invokes this rite and utter the spirit of redemption over her child. Thus empowered to utter the spirit clean and new, the fallen woman / minister - of - the - sacrament is quite openly vindicated by her author" (Morgan: 1988 , 101).

Tess grows with her traumatic experience. A simple, innocent peasant girl Tess 'thus changed from a simple girl to a complex woman' (TD, 125). "Was once lost always lost really true of chastity? She would ask herself" (TD, 126). Hardy thinks: "She might prove it false if she could veil by goes. The recuperative power which pervaded organic nature was surely not denied to maidenhood alone' (*Ibid*) Hardy shows implicitly the battle of Nature with Culture / Society. Tess is distorted by the society's codes of sexual morality and chastity. As Anne Z. Mickelson pertinently observes: "In Tess of the d'Urbervilles the clash between society / culture and nature becomes a passionate defense of Tess as beautiful nature (the natural self, love, fertility, tenderness) and an indictment of a culture which degrades the poor, regards woman's virtue as a commodity to be delivered to the husband on the wedding night, and upholds the double standard". (Mickelson: 1976, 105).

Tess considers her sexual violation and pregnancy as 'passing corporeal blight'. Her past experiences are 'a liberal education to her' (TD, 125). We find a new form of consciousness in Tess. Overcoming her guilty feelings and sense of inferiority, Tess asserts a new form of identity and autonomy. As Patricia Ingham says, 'Hardy wishes to insist on the recognition of individuality as she changes from a simple girl to a complex woman, "whom the turbulent experiences of the last year or two had quite failed to demoralize' (Ingham: 1989, 73).

Wanting to redefine her womanhood in a new way Tess reaches at Talbothays dairy farm. As she journeys to the Froom valley she "felt akin to the landscape" (TD, 132) .As she walks, she is mastered by "the irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure somewhere which pervades all life" (TD, 134). Here Tess's presentation radically differs from other fallen women in literature. In contrast to them Tess is filled with vitality and energy and she still enjoys life around her. We find spontaneous sexuality in Tess. As T.R. Wright observes: 'In moving to Talbothays, then, as well as in falling in love there, Tess is seen to be in tune with natural forces deeper than conventional social morality' (Wright: 1985, 113). P. Ingham comments: 'Since the beginning of the novel Tess's sexuality has been imposed upon the signifying framework of men's language' (Ingham: 1989, 72). Angel feels her sexual attractiveness and thinks: "What a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature that milkmaid is' (TD, 185). Patricia Ingham finds : "Angel Clare reacts to Tess's physical appearance in the same way, as Alec, though, as usual, he gives a high flown gloss to the attraction he feels" (Ingham: 2000, 127) .Angel observes : "She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman - a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half - teasingly"(TD, 167). Rosemarie Morgan observes: "Repudiating pseudonymity she seeks at once to 'cleanse' him of his illusive vision of her and to resist his appropriation, by renaming of her person" (Morgan: 1988 103).

Hardy focuses on the physicality of Tess when Angel's harp playing draws Tess towards him 'in the weed - overgrown garden'. Hardy describes

the scene to show Tess's eroticism in the backdrop of Nature. The weed over-grown - garden "rank with juicy grass which sent up mists of pollen at a touch, and with tall, blooming weeds exciting offensive smells - weeds whose red and yellow and purple hues formed a polychrome as dazzling as those of cultivated flowers" (TD, 158). The 'seductive atmosphere' of Var Vale forces Tess and Angel to come closer, because 'under such atmosphere it was impossible that most fanciful love should not grow passionate' (TD, 190). Angel's sexual attraction to Tess is emphasised in the narrative. As T.R.Wright observes:

Tess continues to be seen very much as part of nature, a warm-blooded animal: when Angel surprises her yawning he sees the 'red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake's', admires the 'satin delicacy' of her skin and finds her the embodiment of 'Pure' and natural sexuality:

'The brim-fulness of her nature breathed from her. It was a moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; when the most spiritual beauty bespeaks itself flesh; and sex takes the outside place in the presentation'.

The purity of her incarnate soul does not involve a disembodied spirituality; it is expressed in physical beauty which Angel clearly longs to possess like the penetrating male sun ... (Wright: 1989, 115).

Penny Boumelha, in her article says,

Tess on the other hand, is trapped by a sexuality which seem at times almost irrelevant to her own experience and sense of her own identity. She is doomed by her 'exceptional physical nature (P. 269) and by the inevitability of an erotic response from men. That response binds her to male images and fantasies: to the pink-cheeks and rustic innocence of Angel's patronising pastoralism (P. 264) and to the proud indifference that Alec finds so piquantly challenging. Her sexuality, provocative without intent, seems inherently guilty by virtue of the reactions it arouses in others: 'And there was revived in her the wretched sentiment which had often come to her before, that in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which Nature had endowed her she was somehow doing wrong' (Boumelha:1982,125).

Projecting reactions of two males - Alec and Angel - to Tess's sexuality - Hardy ironically derides the values of patriarchal society. This society hardly recognises the identity and autonomy of a woman. As George Wotton observes:

From the moment of the meeting in the garden the harmonious relations between Tess and her world begin to be repressed and displaced by certain abstractions mediated by Angel's idealising vision' She is transformed in Angel's sight : 'She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman- a whole sex condensed into one typical form' . . . Angel's idealisation has a profound effect upon Tess for she is treated according to how she is perceived and she is subjected by Angel's idealising vision in a way which is totally different from the way she is exploited by Angel's distracted gaze(Wotton: 1985, 92 ).

Hardy has very explicitly shown that a woman when she strives for autonomy and identity in the society, she faces frustrations and humiliations. On their wedding night when Angel finds 'she has failed in 'purity' he is astonished: 'she looked absolutely pure. Nature, in her fantastic trickery had set such a seal of maidenhood upon Tess's countenance that he gazed at her with a stupefied air' (TD, 303 - 304). Angel conceives of women in terms of polarisation - Madonna or Whore. He concludes that if Tess ceases to be a 'Madonna' i.e. 'Pure,' she is surely a 'whore' or fallen. When Tess asks Angel'of forgiveness he blandly tells her: "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!" (TD, 292).

Angel fails to save Tess at the most critical period of her life. When Tess tells Angel, "O Angel - my mother says that it sometimes happens so! she knows several cases where they were worse than I, and the husband has not minded it much - has got over it at least" (TD, 297). Rejecting his liberal view of class division Angel rebukes Tess : "Don't Tess, don't argue. Different societies, different manners. You almost make me say you are an unapprehending peasant woman who has never been initiated into the proportions of social things, you don't know what you say'(TD, 297). Tess stubbornly resists Angel's attempt to implicate her class with her sexual fail. Angel now thinks that the class from which Tess comes has scarcely any sexual morality. To Angel Tess is now 'an unapprehending peasant woman'. Asserting her personality Tess tells Angel: "I am only a peasant by position not by nature !(TD, 297). Angel shows that he is a typical product of Victorian culture 'which allows a man sexual freedom as long as he is discreet about

and observes appearances' (Mickelson: 1976,117). Hardy attacks the double standard of Victorian sexual morality and cult of chastity. Victorian society blandly ignored the sexual offence of men while it punished those women who breached the social taboos. Tess has never thought that Angel is a prisoner of the double - standard of the society. She has hoped that Angel would forgive her sexual past as she has forgiven his "eight and forty hours dissipation with a stranger in London" Angel is blind to his own sexual lapse while in the case of his wife it is an irreversible crime.

In fact, Angel's anger at Tess's lapse of virginity is in keeping with society's attitude to women sexuality. The social idealists have delegated women to the pedestal of absolute purity. They have suggested that women can attain the status of a moral teacher of men by diffusing the spirit of affection, selflessness, self-restraint fidelity and purity. Angel feels cheated when he finds that Tess ceases to be a model of Victorian womanhood. He indignantly tells Tess: "I thought that any man would have thought that by giving up all ambition to win a wife with social standing with fortune, with knowledge of the world, I should secure pink cheeks" (TD, 304). Angel begins to look upon Tess 'as a species of imposter; a guilty woman in the guise of innocent one' (TD, 293). Ingham notes how Angels words destroy Tess's "remaining sense of self" (Ingham: 2000, 135).

At Trantridge Tess was exploited sexually by Alec d'Urbervilles and at Talbothays she is tortured by the double standard of sexual morality of Angel Clare. Alec sees Tess as a sexual object and Angel looks upon her with his contradictory vision of woman. As Irving Howe observes:

Angel comes to seem the complement of Alec; indeed, the parallels might be trying, if they were not so strictly subordinated to the presentation of Tess herself. Alec assaults Tess physically, Angel violates her spiritually. Alec is a stage villain, Angel is an intellectual wretch. Alec has a certain charm, in his amiable slothful way; Angel bears an aura of tensed moralism. What they share is an incapacity to value the splendor of feeling which radiates from Tess. Each represents a deformation of masculinity, one high and the other low; they cannot appreciate, they cannot even see the richness of life that Tess embodies. Yet there are important differences At

least Alec does not pontificate, or wrap himself in a cloak of principles. He may not be admirable but he can be likeable, simply because commonplace vice is easier to bear than elevated righteousness (Howe: 1966, 122-23).

Angel thinks his wife as his property. To him the value of Tess has been diminished due to her loss of virginity. He expects from Tess sexual purity, sexual passivity and other feminine virtues. So when Angel finds that Tess's chastity fails to satisfy the conventional standard of the society he becomes angry with her. It is not Tess he has loved but a "visionary essence of woman". He has shaped a "Tess" to feed his own needs and desires. Angel has been loving the idea of a virginal girl and has never acknowledged her true self, including her fully - developed sexuality. Rosemary Sumner offers a unique analysis of Angel's rejection of Tess:

[Angel's] 'sexual impulsions, the idealisation and falsification in valuing Tess for the one attribute which she has lost are all there in Hardy's account of him. That he feels guilt over his earlier liaison is suggested by his fear of Tess rejecting him if he tells her before the wedding, and in the way he minimises the whole affair, though Hardy's earlier reference to it had suggested it was a matter of some importance to him . . . The "narcissistic it had suggested it was a matter of some importance to him . . . The "narcissistic self-regard" also shows itself in the way he thinks that he will "secure rustic innocence" for himself by marrying Tess - significantly, an abstract idea, not of human being. Thus, Hardy seems to have two motives in giving Angel his previous affair. First, it gives a psychological basis for his idealisation and rejection of Tess; because of his guilt feelings he needs her to be the embodiment of the purity which he feels he has lost; when he finds he cannot "procure (it) in this roundabout way," his rejection of her is inevitable since she has lost all value for him (Sumner: 1981, 137).

Angel's paradoxical morality causes Tess's psychic dislocation and she internalizes the guilt appropriate to a 'fallen woman'. She wants to put an end to her life by committing suicide. After her wedding with Angel, Tess's transformation into self-despising, self-effacing, guilt-ridden woman is complete. She tells Angel: "I thought because I am not respectable, I mean. I told you I thought I was not respectable enough long ago - and on that account I didn't want to marry you, only - only you urged me!" (TD, 308). Angel turns a deaf ear to Tess's requests and reasons. As the narrator observes: "Within the remote depth of his constitution . . . there lay hidden a hard logical

deposit, like a vein of metal in a soft loam, which turned the edge of everything that attempted to traverse it' (TD, 308). Angel's ambiguous morality has forced Tess to come down to the level of a 'fallen woman' and she looks upon herself as an impure woman. She tells Angel: "I shan't ask you to let me live with you, Angel, because I have no right to! I shall not write to mother and sisters to say we be married, as I said I would do'; . . . 'No I shan't do anything, unless you order me to and if you go away from me, I shall not follow 'ee, and if you never speak to me anymore I shall not ask you why, unless you tell me I may' (TD, 294).

The double - standard of sexual morality punishes Tess with social ostracism but it completely ignored and secretly supported Angel's infidelity and offences. This society encourages men to worship women. Men like Angel created the other section of women, destroying their bodies, conscience and souls. They demanded moral and physical purity from their wives, daughters and sisters - they forces another group of women to live in an utter inhuman condition. They were not only denied human dignity but they were also extremely exploited by the male - oriented socio - economic system. Angel wrests a second chance out of life. But Tess is denied the privileges that Angel is provided with. Now only two options remains open to her - to take to back-breaking labour of a field - worker or adopt the profession of a prostitute.

When Angel returns from Brazil discrediting 'the old appraisements of morality' (TD, 433), it is too late. Though he believes now that 'the beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses" (*ibid*), Angel "succeeds in violating Tess's spirit as thoroughly as Alec rapes her body" : (Mickelson:1976, 117). Actually Hardy has shown through Angel and Alec the society's attitude to women. At Flintcomb-Ash Tess is again exposed to the sexual aggression of Alec. He appears as a religious convert before Tess. He accuses Tess of tempting him: "And why then you tempted me? I was firm as a man could be till I saw those eyes and that mouth again - surely there never was such a maddening mouth since Eve's!" (TD, 411) Ian Gregor observes:

Alec D'Urberville enters the field, now wholly intent on winning Tess back to him, having abandoned his preaching and resumed 'the old jaunty, slap-dash guise under which Tess had first known her admirer'. The parallel forces begin to enclose Tess; the nameless engine man driving the shaking platform on which she is forced to work, the seducer renewing his temptation Economic and physical passion is the object of both, money the common means (Gregor: 1973, 193).

With the honesty and integrity of a 'pure woman' Tess resists Alec's offer of financial help. She knows that Alec only wants her physically.

After Angel deserts Tess she is left with no other means than to take to back breaking job of a field - labourer. Tess's engagement at Flint Comb Ash, 'the starve acre place' exposes her to a new form of economic exploitation and sexual aggression. As Douglas Brown sees, "Tess is not only the pure woman, the ballad heroine, the country girl: she is the agricultural community in its moment of ruin" (Brown: 1954, 91).

Hardy shows Tess's heroic struggle against her sexual and economic exploitation. Being a chronicler of rural Wessex, he records the destruction of the old form of agricultural production with the intrusion of mechanized agriculture. He contrasts the harmonious community life at Talbothay with the dehumanized relationship at Flint Comb Ash. Hardy projects the cruelty and barrenness of the place using nature metaphor : 'After this season of congealed dampness came a spell of dry frost, when strange birds from behind the North pole began to arrive silently on the upland of Flint Comb-Ash; gaunt spectral creatures with tragical eyes - eyes which had witnessed scene of cataclysmal horror in inaccessible polar regions of a magnitude such as no human being had ever conceived, in curdling temperatures that no human could endure' (TD, 367).

Tess and her companions are employed in back-breaking labour amidst this inhospitable landscape. As Hardy informs, "Here the air was dry and cold and the long cart roads were blown white and dusty within a few hours after rain. There were few trees, or none, those that would have grown in the hedges being mercilessly plashed sown with the quickest by the tenant

farmers, the natural enemies of tree, bush and brake" (TD, 358). Hardy wants to stress on the barenness and in hospitality of the place. As Lucille Herbert observes, "What Hardy does in the descriptive parts of the novel, then, is to exhibit his heroine within the shifting boundaries of a realistic landscape whose contours are moralized by the narrators pre-occupation with attitudes to life and his use of topographical and optical metaphors' (Herbert: 1970, 90).

At Flint Comb Ash Tess's oppression becomes double as she is a female labour. As Michael Millgate observes: "She is also oppressed by the people who know different parts of her and thus represent to her a conscious or unconscious threat" (Millgate: 1994, 266). Hardy through the specific case of Tess generalizes the distress and exploitation of women agricultural labourers. At Flint Comb - Ash women labourers are employed at low wages and they are exposed to hard work from early morning till evening without respite. Farm Manager Groby recruits in his farm female labourers only. Because women are easy game for him. They are given minimum wage for maximum work. As Hardy says : "For some probable economical reason it was usually a woman who was chosen for this particular duty, and Groby gave as his motive in selecting Tess that she was one of those who best combined strength with quickness in untying and both with staying, power and this may have been true" (TD, 417 ).

Hardy has explicitly shown that in the system of capitalistic production women are discriminated against in their wages and working condition. As Janet Freedman observes, "Patriarchy and Capitalism are independent but linked; they are two distinct systems but they are intertwined and create interdependence and solidarity among men which allows them to dominate women. This domination has its material foundation in men's control over women's labour" (Freedman: 2002, 50). The new form of capitalist farming was eroding age old traditional relationships. Rural communities were crumbling down at the approach of industrial civilization. As Arnold Kettle observes: "The scene at the threshing is here particularly important a symbol of dehumanized relationships of the new capitalist form' (Kettle: 1978, 48). At Flint Comb Ash Tess is forced to work very closely with huge machinery. Mr.

Groby put her in danger of being hurt by some of the machinery. This machinery represent the advent of industrialisation that was destroying rural community-based farming. Hardy depicts the evil effect of this industrial culture on rural life. As Rosemarie Morgan observes:

The labour/woman exploitative, machine-grinding world in Tess, its exhausting demands closely linked at salient points throughout the text to Tess's beleaguered states of being, is quite clearly a causal factor in her tragedy; the taxing demands upon her energy and resilience have immediate, palpably felt repercussions upon her faculties. Hardy's most potent emblematic image in this context is, of course, the 'red tyrant that the women had come to serve ... which kept a despotic demand upon the endurance of their muscles and nerves (TD, p.372).

The 'buzzing red glutton', remorselessly grinding, bears a suggestive resemblance to the lusty Alec; man and machine alike reduce Tess to physical exhaustion and mental stupefaction (Morgan:1988:90).

Hardy depicts Tess's destruction by the changing means of production. The new forms of capitalist farming were eroding ageold traditional relationships. Age old ties and rural values were eroding due to encroachment of an alien industrial culture in the tradition bound rural society. To make room for rapid industrialisation the rural population had to seek shelter elsewhere. As Lucille Herbert in his essay says:

Communities are held together by non-rational bonds of the kind which the rationalist Hazlitt describes as "the gross and narrow ties of sense, custom, authority". Associative societies are formed by rationally calculated interest often expressed in contracts. In the preface to Far From the Madding Crowd Hardy writes of the change in Wessex from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft of the 'recent supplanting of the class of stationary cottagers . . . by a population more or less migratory labourers' This change has been fatal to 'the preservation of legend, folklore, close inter-social ties, for which the indispensable conditions of existence are attachment to the soil of one particular spot by generation after generation" (Lucille Herbert, 1970, 83- 84).

As Tess's family belongs to marginal peasant community it become a victim of the inexorable processes of historical change. The passing away of old agrarian life and also a new mode of life centering round the city is narrated by Hardy:

A depopulation was also going on. The village had formerly contained, side by side with the agricultural labourers, an interesting and better informed class, ranking distinctly above the former - the class to which Tess's father and mother had belonged - and including the carpenter, the smith, the shoemaker, the huckster, together with nondescript workers other than farm-labourers; a set of people who owed a certain stability of aim and conduct to the fact of their being life-holders like Tess's father, or, copyholders, or, occasionally small freeholders . . . . These families, who had formed backbone of the village life in the past, who were the depositaries of the village traditions, had to seek refuge in the large centres (TD 449-50).

Thomas Hardy was painfully aware of social and economic implication of this rural exodus : Tess's father was a life holder. John Durbervilles life had a value apart from his personal achievements or perhaps it could not have had much. It was the last of the three lives for whose duration the house and premises were held under a lease. Moreover, 'liveries' were disapproved in villages almost as much as small freeholders because of their independence of manner. The narrator informs that this system left disastrous consequences: 'But as the long holdings fell in they were seldom again let to similar tenants and were mostly pulled down, if not absolutely required by the farmer for his hands. Cottagers who were not directly employed by the land were looked upon with disfavour, and the banishment of some starved the trade of others, who were thus obliged to follow (TD, 450). Arnold Kettle refers to the impact of rapid industrialization on rural society:

'That in the course of the nineteenth century the disintegration of the peasantry - a process which had its root deep in the past- had reached its final tragic stage. With the extension of capitalist farming, (farming that is to say, in which the landowners farms not for sustenance but for profit in which the land-workers become wage-earners ) the old yeoman class of small-holders or peasants, with their traditions of independence and their own native culture, was bound to disappear. The developing forces of history were too strong for them and their way of life. And because that way of life had been proud and deeprooted its destruction was necessarily painful and tragic. Tess is the story and the symbol of destruction (Kettle: 1978, 45).

The miserable condition of 'agricultural labourer' forced many young girls into the dark world of prostitution for the sake of survival when all the avenues of income were closed to them. Low wages and physically

demanding work in the field and inadequate nutrition made a woman labourer victim of severe illness. Merryn Williams observes:

During his stay in London, Hardy must have got used to the sight of prostitutes, resplendent in feathers and fine clothing, on every city street. He must also have known about the thousands of young girls who were leaving Dorset and the country districts to come up to 'Town', for it was always the girls who were the first to go . . . Some of them went into 'service' or into the factories; some, inevitably, drifted into being what the Victorians called 'fallen women' . . . One can not blame this girls Hardy appears to be saying. It is the society which has made them like this (quoted in Chakraborty: 1997, 55).

Tess's unemployment and the destitute condition of her family forces her to sell her body. When Tess's family is denied the renewal of the lease of the cottage and the moral guardians of the village desire that the D'Urbervilles family should leave the village 'if only in the interest of morality' (TD, 450,) she and her family come on the pavement. Alec offers to help Tess's family. Tess has no other alternative than to accept his offer and she knows very well the price she has to pay for this.

Particia Ingham notes, 'The last phase of the novel 'Fulfilment' presents before us a Tess with 'a period of autonomy before she dies' (Ingham, 1989). When Angel finds Tess at Sandbourne, a luxurious watering place Tess was 'loosely wrapped in a cashmere dressing gown of gray-white, embroidered in half-mourning tints' (TD, 483). Tess tells Angel "These clothes are what he's put upon me; I don't care what he did with me!"(TD, 484). Angel cannot recognise this Tess with her spirit of self-assertion. He feels that "Tess has spiritually ceased to recognise the body before him as hers - allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will"(TD, 484). Discarding all her previous sense of guilt and shame for her new profession, she takes the law in her own hand. She stabs Alec to death. Angel finds to his horror that Tess is least perturbed by committing this murder. Tess being "unable to realize the gravity of her conduct . . . seemed at last content" (TD 492) and Angel "wondered what

'obscure stain in the D'urberville blood had led to this aberration'(ibid) Patricia Ingham observes :

Tess's acts of will represent the culmination of the whole sequence. The events involved figure of monstrousness of the only choice that is left to her, the only meaning she can express after the final shock of Angel's coming to claim her when she has already returned to Alec as his mistress. In stabbing Alec to release herself for Angel she feels free even from guilt (Ingham-1989,88).

Hardy comes in clash with the society for justifying Tess's murder of Alec. He shows that Tess's murder is an assertion against the social forces. This self-assertion gives her a new identity in the contemporary Victorian novel. As Kevin Z. Moore observes: "Only once in her life does Tess free herself from the formal constraints of culture, and that is when she murders Alec. Her murder is a poetic act, properly revolutionary and romantic .... By murdering Alec, Tess exchanges the passive acceptance of cultural dominance for the self assertiveness of poetic action" (Moore: 1990, 176). Justifying Tess's violent action Hardy wants to convey the message that when an oppressed woman asserts against the injustices of the society, the society terms her a murderer. Murdering Alec Tess gains fulfillment. She unites with her betrayer husband Angel and forgives his wrong.

The patriarchal society grants Angel the privilege to start his life anew through his marriage with Tess's sister Elizabeth. But the inexorable law of the society intercepts Tess at Stonehenge. As Nina Auerbach observes : "She finds her ultimate home not in her posthumous reconciliation with Angel, but at the empty alter of Stonehenge where she waits to be arrested receiving through this final setting architectural, historical and divine recognition things give Tess an epic life belying her recurrent humiliation" (Auerbach:1980, 42).

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Tess is executed and the black flag becomes symbol of the end of her tormented life. The male dominated society exploited her sexually, economically and finally when she asserted herself against the society, it terms her a 'murderess' and hangs her. In his previous novels, Hardy has

shown that to attain self-fulfillment a woman must come in clash with the social codes and rebel against the conventional values. As a woman Tess is an easy game to the judiciary. The conventional judiciary is blind to the offence of a male that degrades her and betrays her. The myopic vision of the judiciary cannot identify the real offender. Satirizing the judiciary for hanging an innocent woman Hardy comments: "Justice was done and the President of the Immortals in the Aeschylean phrase ended his sport with Tess" (TD 508).

Tess struggled against the society to be identified as a woman in her own right. She resists heroically the degrading forces of the society. By creating an avenging womanhood Hardy breaks away from the conventional norms of presentation of woman. In his previous novels Hardy presented women characters who compromised with the ideology of the society. But Tess became rebellious against the patriarchal values of the society and avenges herself against it at the cost of her life. For presenting Tess radically Hardy incited the wrath of the conventional readers and critics. Mowbray Morris in 'Quarterly Review' observed about Tess: "She would never have gone back at the first opportunity to her seducer, a coarse sensual brute for whom she had never professed to feel anything but dislike considering the book then, with our necessarily imperfect knowledge, it seems only that Mr. Hardy has told an extremely disagreeable story in an extremely disagreeable manner" (quoted in Cox, 1970, 218-19). Mrs Oliphant in Blackwood's Magazine questioned Tess's purity and integrity as a woman : 'The lodging at the sea side drawing -room floor; 'the rich cashmere dressing-gown of grey white, embroidered in half-mourning tints'; 'the walking costume of a well-to-do young lady', with a veil over her black hat and feathers, her 'silk stockings and ivory parasol' - are not the accessories of purity, but the trapping of vice' (quoted in Cox:1970,213). Refuting the charges of the orthodox critics, Hardy declared, "I consider she was to all intents and purposes a pure woman till her last fall. There she was a mere corpse drifting in the water to her end" (quoted in Ellidge: 1991, 388). In a preface to the 1891 edition of the novel Hardy claimed that the 'novel is an attempt to give artistic form to a true sequence of things and 'if an offence came out of the truth better is it that the offence come than the truth be concealed', (Preface to TD, 1891,v). Hardy continues this

discourse of radicalism in the next novel Jude the Obscure where he deals with some of the burning issues relating to the rise of the New Woman. But Tess certainly anticipates this 'New Woman Novel'.