CHAPTER SIX
TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

"My life looks as if it had been wasted for want of chance ---. I'm like the poor Queen of Sheba who lived in the Bible"
(Tess on her personal life)

"Justice" was done, and the President of the Immortals had ended his sport with Tess"
(Hardy on Tess's end)
Tess of the D'Urbervilles, the last but one novel of Thomas Hardy, occupies a distinct place among the author's creative works. It shows how far the writer of Far From the Madding Crowd has travelled in his literary journey to cater to Victorian and modern readers and how more than providing just entertainment he has succeeded in holding the mirror up to human nature and British society at the end of the Victorian era. Soon after the publication of the novel in November 1891, the contemporary journal, the Star brought out a review of the novel which shows how it was received. Richard le Gallienne, observed:

"Despite the painful moral, the noble, though some what obtrusive 'purpose', Tess of the D'urbervilles is one of Mr. Hardy's best novels ---- perhaps it is his very best. The beautiful simplicity of style, the permeating healthy sweetness of his description, the idyllic charm and yet the reality of his figures, the apple-sweet woman, his old man, his love-making, his fields, his sympathetic atmosphere ---- all these, and any other of Mr. Hardy's best qualities you can think of, are to be found in widest commonality spread in Tess."

Tess is not just about a pure woman betrayed by man, morality, and the President of the Immortals but a complex structure of many other natural human elements. True, the theme of the novel is human suffering, an unfortunate country girl, fighting the good but loneyl fight of self-assertion against invincible odds but as George Wing points out, "yet in

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Tess, a transcendental purity of spirit, embracing all that is charitably humble and devotedly unselfish, survived long enough to enthrone humanity in a brief splendour.\(^2\)

The plot of the novel is simple and to some extent not quite original. Its familiarity springs from the eternal triangle, the wronged woman who cannot escape her past, the double standard of morality for man and woman for the same sins of omission and commission were themes known to Victorian masters of fiction. Hardy's poetic power, as Jean R. Brooks holds, lies in crossing and challenging the Victorian moral tale with the ethic of folk tradition.\(^3\) Not only this, he makes the novel a grim picture of Victorian countryside, the decay of agriculture, the assault of machinery and exploitation of the poor. All these elements add up to an impressive vision of human misery not only at the hands of fate but also misdeeds of fellow human beings.

*Tess of the D'urbervilles* sub-titled "A Pure Woman" is organized round the seven ‘phases’ of the heroine’s personal story to give pointers to the direction in which her impersonal life is moving. Her first phase ‘The Maiden’ begins with a picture of Durbeyfield family in the vale of Blackmoor. The sweet and innocent girl of Marlott village captures our imagination. Tess’s maidenhood ends when Alec D’urbervilles seduces her in the darkness of the night. The second phase ‘Maiden No More’ follows Tess’s return home with the consciousness of original sin on her to

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\(^2\) G. Wing, *Hardy*, p.68

the birth and death of her baby Sorrow, and re-integration into country ritual. When molested she looked upon herself as 'a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence' but when rejoined with communal life she thinks 'The past was past'. On one point she was resolved:

"There should be no more d'urberville air-castles in the dreams and deeds of her new life. She would be the dairymaid, Tess and nothing more."

In phase the third, 'The Rally', the experience and personality of the dairymaid Tess are enlarged at Talbothays by Angel Clare, sceptic son of Father Clare. The mutual attraction and the final unpremeditated kiss that ends this phase means that 'something had occurred which changed the pivot of the universe for their two natures'. In the Fourth Phase 'The Consequence' Tess hands over part of herself to the impersonal force of love. This phase follows the maturing natural relationship of two lovers meeting as surely as two streams in one valley until Tess's fatal confession of her past relation with Alec on her wedding night. In phase the Fifth, 'The Woman Pays', the personal Tess is gradually depersonalized, first of all by the abstract ideal of purity which Angel prefers to her real human self, and secondly, when he has abandoned her, by the increasingly automatic mode of her life. Now seeking not happiness, but mere survival, she has a second recovery through endurance of winter chill and snow and rough work at Flintcomb Ash farm.

The closing in of her implacable past to submerge her personal identity occupies the Sixth Phase 'The Convert'. She confronts Alec again. But despite the temptation of his offer she makes her last helpless gesture as an independent woman in the D'urberville vaults, where her homeless family have camped, for the night 'why am I on the wrong side of this door'. In the last phase, 'Fulfilment', the 'coarse pattern' that had
been traced 'upon, this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer' is fulfilled at Stonehenge, a place of religious sacrifice and Wintoncester, ancient social capital of Wessex. Alec's murder and Tess's execution identify the personal Tess with the D'urberville, the scapegoat victim of fertility rites, and those innate and external pressures which level down the human being into something less than human.

The phase-wise study of the "Pure Woman" gives us an opportunity to view the crises in Tess's life with reference to her environment. The method of presenting the necessary fact about D'urbervilles descent, the picture of John Durbyfield and his encounter with the parson who puts false ideas of family superiority in his head are superb. The description of the secluded Vale of Blackmoor in which the village of Marlott lies provides us realistic pictures of rural life, custom, culture, occupation and the romantic dancing maids. After this charming scenario is presented the uglier aspects of Marlott life. It deepens when Joan Durbyfield and her husband are found soaking in a public house. Its practical result is to make it necessary for Tess to begin earning money. She is persuaded to apply to her "rich relation", Mrs. D'urbervilles, who lives with her son, Alec at the big house called "The Slopes."

Employed by the rich relation Tess looks after her fowls and Alec follows her in his own wicked way. One evening she joins a night drinking pilgrimage to Chaseborough where she is attacked by one of Alec's last mistresses. Just to show his sympathies to Tess, he rescues her and carries her off on horseback into the dark forest. Exhausted by the day's work and evening's revelry, she falls asleep and wakes to find herself "maiden no more."
Returning home Tess is rebuked by her mother for not hiring Alec into marriage but she decides to make a fresh start. She goes to the Valley of the Great Dairies. And presently comes the discovery that Fate has sent her to the farm where Angel Clare is working as a pupil. There other girls of the Dairy —— Izz, Retty and Marian crave for Clare. But ultimately he marries Tess. The marriage, however, brings no happiness to her. Her confession of past life makes Clare very sad and he goes away to Brazil to try his luck in farming. Tess moves to Flintcomb Ash to earn an honest living rather than beg at the door of her in-laws. At last ground down by poverty and drudgery, she goes to see Clare’s parents. She misses her mother-in-law and plods desperately back to her work. On her way she meets the converted Alec. Meanwhile the condition of her parents worsens and she is ultimately thrown into the arms of Alec, thinking that “in a brute sense this man alone was her husband.”

And then comes the phase of ‘fulfilment’. Clare after receiving Tess’s pathetic letter returns to England. By the time he decides to seek Tess it is too late. He finds his wife living with Alec as his mistress. However, peeved by Alec’s dirty remark about her husband Tess kills Alec and wipes out the stain on her person. She pursues Clare to the railway station and is contented to be his companion during the travel through the countryside. They experience something of marital happiness when they wander into the New Forest and find a lodge in a vacant furnished manor house. After a week they slip away to avoid discovery and set out for northern districts. But Hardy brings them to Stonehenge where Tess is arrested. Her hanging meant “justice done.”

The sense of reality is vital to *Tess of the D’urbervilles*. It is the reality of the physical world in which human beings find meaning and
definition. In the character of Tess, Hardy stakes everything on his sensuous apprehension of a young woman's life, a girl who is at once a simple milk maid and archetype of feminine strength. "In her violation, neglect and endurance, Tess comes to seem Hardy's most radical claim for the redemptive power of suffering." She is one of the supreme examples in the English novel through whom Hardy elevates to the point of sublimation the suffering of an individual. Tess derives from Hardy's involvement with and reaction against the Victorian cult of chastity which from the beginning of his career he had known to be corrupted by meanness and hysteria. She falls from the social norms of her society and violates the conventions of her day. And yet as Howe points out "in her incomparable vibrancy and lovingness, she comes to represent a spiritualized transcendence of chastity."

Hardy employs his finest artistic touches to delineate Tess. The young sweet girl of twelve with phases of her childhood lurking in her person strikes our attention when we find her a helpless passenger along with other young souls in the Durbyfield ship. A false sense of ancestry drives her parents to send her to Mrs. D'urbervilles where she falls in the traps of the libertine, Alec. She had hoped to be a teacher at the school, but the fates seemed to decide otherwise. In the course of her service at her employer's house she was raped by Alec. Inner Strength comes to her when she decides to forget the past and goes to the valley of Dairies. Fortune smiles there for a while and she wins the heart of Angel Clare. But the marriage proves unlucky. With the departure of her husband to

4 Irving Howe, *Thomas Hardy*, P.110
5 *Ibid*, p.110
South America she refuses to be tempted by Alec and proves her mettle at Flintcomb Ash. Critics observe that Tess dies three times to live: again: first with Alec D’urbervilles, then with Angel Clare, and lastly with Alec again. Absolute victim of her wretched circumstances, she is ultimately beyond their stain.

His romanticism enabled Hardy to break past the repressions of the Protestant ethic and move into a kindlier climate but it was also his innovative romanticism which threatened his wish for a return to a simple, primitive Christianity. Tess represents something more deeply rooted in the substance of a life of instincts. She suffers both at the hand of man and nature but ultimately emerges triumphant in the fulfilment of her mission of life. From the vaults of her ancestors she comes to Stonehenge and offers herself for sacrifice to the judges of the world. Jean R. Brooks rightly observes:

"Tess dies, but the meaning of her life, and of the whole book lies in her vibrant humanity, her woman’s power of suffering, renewal and compassion, which has restored Angel to his rightful nature as Man, conscious of guilt and imperfection."

Alec D’urbervilles, the spoilt son of Mrs. D’urbervilles, appears as a coxcomb and a rake. As seducer of innocent Tess in the garden of his house he proves to be a virtual Satan in his design and planning to ravish the poor girl. When Tess fails to meet Alec’s mother he takes her to the fruit garden and entertains her. Later as her supposed rescuer he takes her round and round the forest and takes full advantage of her sleeping condition. When Tess realises what Alec has done to her she sets out for her parents house but Alec again confronts her and tempts her to submit to his sensualities which she flatly refuses. Alec is a determined rascal but

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6 Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure, p.253
Tess goes to the valley of Dairies where her love affair with Clare temporarily relieves her of the haunting image of Alec. Unfortunately Tess’s marriage, with her confession and departure of her husband from England again gave an opportunity to Alec to lure Tess. For sometime she endured the rigorous labour at Flintcomb Ash but finally trusted Alec’s word that “Clare would never return.” She capitulated in the face of the dire poverty of her family and agreed to live with him as his mistress. Retribution comes when he is killed by Tess in his bed room as he had the audacity to speak foul words against Clare. Thus the last of the fake D’urbervilles died a dog’s death and was paid the wages of his sin.

Alec’s double-role of ‘rescuer’ and ‘ravisher’ is clearly defined by Hardy in Tess of the D’urbervilles. He played this part earlier but his behaviour through the Flintcomb Sequence is significant. At this point again he appears in a double guise: he is both kinder and cruder to Tess than is anyone else, both more humane and sinister. His tributes to Tess’s beauty are interesting even when he goes about preaching as a “convert”. Only he among the figures surrounding her offers Tess and the Wretched Durbyfields any help. Yet it is also Alec who comes to seem a kind of devil. Tess succumbs and hates him. His murder is an act of desperate assertion which places Tess in the line of folk heroines who kill because they can no longer bear outrage. Alec D’urbervilles is comparatively a more complex kind of villain as compared to Sargeant Troy in Far From the Madding Crowd.

Angel Clare, the elder son of Father Clare, is a timid convert to modernist thought and refuses to go to Cambridge like his other brothers. He possesses neither the firmness of the old nor the boldness of the new.
Irving Howe has remarked that by his action Clare comes to seem the complement of Alec in the novel:

"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 awe of tensed moralism —— yet there are important differences. At least Alec does not pontificate, or wrap himself in a cloak of principles —— Together the two men represent everything in Hardy's world, and not his alone, which betrays spontaneous feeling and the flow of instinctual life".  

It would not be quite fair to consider Clare an intellectual who despite his dislike of superficial religion clings to social norms when it comes to the acceptance of Tess as his wife. Her revelation of the past relationship shatter his dream of a happy life. Instead of establishing himself as a farmer in some corner of England he chooses to go to Brazil. This is just to avoid the double torture of living with a woman of bad repute and being exposed to the ridicule of other people. Before leaving he gives some money to Tess and even asks her to meet her parents if she was in need of help. But Tess's nature was such that she gave away the money to her parents and persisted in working at Flintcomb-Ash. It was disgust that forced him to leave the shores of England but it was hard luck that made him suffer in Brazil. His illness was both physical and mental. The best part of his character comes out when he returns to his native country and begins his search of Tess whom he wants to accept as his "wife". He was rather late. In the intervening period her poverty and care for the family forced her to go to Alec again. Her quarrel with Clare

7 Irving Howe, opp.cit. pp.122-123
was natural but she still retained sparks of her love for him. She killed Alec because he was responsible for tarnishing her image as a maiden and also for destroying her happiness as a married woman. The ‘fulfilment’, therefore, came. She experienced real happiness for a short period in a manor house with her lover and husband. Clare accepted her request to marry Lize-Lu who was ‘a spiritualized image’ of Tess. “Justice” was done to Tess but Clare moved forward to rescue her sister from “the ship of Durbyfield family.”

II

*Tess of the D'urbervilles* which first appeared in serial magazines and was later brought out in bowdlerized form by *The Graphic* in November 1891 became the focal point of literary critics and reviewers. They dealt in their own scholarly way with the treatment of the “profound factors in the imaginative illustration of life” by Hardy. Curiously enough most of the writers including Anonymous ones highlighted the philosophical aspect of the novel. They discussed the role of Nature, Fate, Unseen power to undo human ambitions by robbing them of happiness and exposing them to misery and death. It is curious to note that this trend continued right up to the middle of the twentieth century and only after World War II another powerful dimension in Hardy’s work, especially in *Tess* and *Jude* was discovered and discussed in detail. This was obviously the socio-economic dimension.

Let us first of all refer to the views of contemporary journals and literary magazines regarding the philosophical and tragic view of life. *The Pall Mall Gazette* (31 December, 1891) observed that *Tess* “is a grim
Christmas gift that Mr. Hardy makes us, in the last Wessex tale.”
Illustrating this point the writer said:

“In Far From the Madding Crowd, and in other of the brighter fictions of the author, there is, it is true, tragedy as well as comedy and happy endings: but the whole effect is fairly one of rustic geniality ---- The art of the tale writer who can take a simple history like that of Tess Durbyfield (alias D’urbervilles), and turn it over, and shape it and interpret it to so profound an ethical and aesthetical result ---- is not, indeed, to be easily reduced to terms of criticism. Mr. Hardy has never exercised his art more powerfully ---- never more tragically than in this most moving presentation of a ‘pure woman’”.

The review in Athenaem (9 January 1892) is equally significant:

“Prof. Huxley once compared life to a game of chess played by man against an enemy, invisible, relentless, wresting every error and every accident to his own advantage. Some such idea must have influenced Mr. Hardy in his narrative of the fortunes of Tess Durbyfield---- In dealing with ‘this sorry scheme of things entire’ Mr. Hardy has written a novel that is not only good, but great”.

Clementina Black wrote about Tess in Illustrated London News (9 January 1892) that the conventional reader wishes to be excited by a novel but not to be disturbed; he likes to have new pictures presented to his imagination, but not to have new ideas presented to his mind:

9 Ibid, p.183
“Mr. Hardy’s new novel is in many respects the finest work which he has yet produced, and its superiority is largely due to a profound moral earnestness”.  

The anonymous reviewer of the *Saturday Review* (16 January 1892) was moved to say:

“Few people will deny the terrible dreariness of this tale, which, except during the few hours spent with cows, has a gleam of sunshine anywhere —-Mr. Hardy, it must be conceded, tells an unpleasant story in a very unpleasant way”.  

R.H. Hutton’s article in *Spectator* (23 January 1892) is quite representative of the general view held by critics:

“Hardy has written one of his most powerful novels, perhaps the most powerful which he ever wrote, to illustrate his conviction that not only is there no Providence guiding individual man and woman, but that, in many cases there is something like a malign fate which draws them out of the right way into the wrong way”.  

The best illustration of the novel view of the novel *Tess* is that of William Watson who analysing in *Academy* (6 February 1892) the “tragic masterpiece” maintained:

“The great theme of the book is the incessant penalty paid by the innocent for the wicked, the unsuspicious for the crafty, the child for its fathers; and again and again this spectacle, in its wide diffusion, provokes the novelist to a scarcely suppressed declaration of rebellion against a supramundane ordinance that can decree, or permit, the triumph of such wrong——”.

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10 Ibid. p.186  
11 Ibid. p.190  
12 Ibid. pp. 191-92  
13 Ibid. p. 199
Thus, according to the critic, the book may be said to resolve itself into a direct arraignment of the morality of this system of vicarious pain ——— a morality which ‘may be good enough for the divinities, but is scorned by average human nature.’

In Tess the sport of the President of Immortals is revealed in a very tragic manner. Step by step these pitiless hunters pursue a lovely and innocent woman to so terrible a climax that it becomes difficult to follow the infernal chase to the very end. It begins with the folly of John Durbyfields and his silly claim to ancestral family. The death of the horse ‘Prince’ in an accident somehow made Tess think of herself ‘a murderess’ without any personal cause. The sport of the Immortals was followed in bringing the higher nature into intimacy with a lower:

“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”.

Step by step the Immortals continued their malignant sport ——— the baptism of the baby by Tess herself, without clerical rites, its death and burial, the revival of possible life and joy in her heart. The next step in the pursuit was the renewed meeting with Angel Clare, their marriage, his confession of previous error with a woman, her own piteous confession to him and his immediate rejection of her. Her mental and physical sufferings at Flintcomb Ash and final surrender to Alec are all part of the game of the Immortals:

As flies to wanton boys are we to gods
They kill us for their sport.

What one can never fail to recognize in Tess is the persistency with which there alternately smoulders through the book Hardy’s passionate protest
against the unequal justice meted by society to the man and woman associated in an identical breach of the moral law.

"He himself proposes no remedy, suggests no escape ----- his business not being to deal in nostrums of social therapeutics. He is content to make his readers pause, and consider, and pity; and very likely he despairs of any satisfactory solution of the problem which he presents with such disturbing power and clothes with vesture of such breathing and throbbing life".14

The socio-economic dimension in Hardy's novels was emphasized by some post World War II scholars. Critics like Douglas Brown, Arnold Kettle, J.C. Maxwell and others studied the impact of the force of economy, industry and modernism in their appreciation of Hardy's novel, sometimes pushing their point of view to ideological extremes. Both Douglas Brown and Arnold Kettle see Tess as victim of a social disintegration that has been caused by the coming of industrialism to the English countryside. Brown's stress is traditional and Kettle's Marxist, but both critics tend to read the book as a social fable. According to Brown "Tess is the agricultural predicament in metaphor, engaging Hardy's deepest impulses of sympathy and allegiance."15 In so reading the novel he stresses the care with which the novelist fixes the action in the context of country ritual, even through half-forgotten and decadent. Kettle writes that Tess has

"the quality of a social document. It has even, for all its high-pitched emotional quality, the kind of impersonality that the expression suggest. Its subject is all pervasive, affecting and determining the nature of every part. It is a novel with a thesis ----- and the thesis is true. The thesis is that in the latter half of the last century the disintegration

14 Ibid. p.202
15 Douglas Brown: Thomas Hardy
Both Brown and Kettle point, the former with more subtlety than the latter, to the superbly rendered social frame which makes Tess what she is and in which she acts out her ordeal. We cannot think of Tess except as a Wessex girl rooted in Wessex particulars and these particulars form part of the social substance which concerns the critics. In the following pages a detailed study of the Wessex environment has been made to explain the uniqueness of Tess among Hardy’s later novels.

The socio-economic factors are so artistically blended in the texture of Tess of the D’urbervilles that unconventional critics have either minimised their impact on character and destiny or over-emphasized them. Hardy used his descriptive power to suggest the importance of these external factors in giving a realistic picture of Wessex in the later decades of the Victorian era.

In the very beginning of the novel ‘the plain Jack Durbyfield, the haggler’ meets Parson Tringham who puts into head that he was ‘the lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the D’urbervilles’. This sets him not only to indulge in reverie of past glories but actively to engage the services of a boy to take up his basket and to go on an errand for him to The Pure Drop Inn and send a horse and carriage to him immediately. Not only this. He instructs the boy to go to his house and ask his wife to put away washing and other odd work. The “mighty” of the

16 Arnold Kettle in Introduction to the English Novel II
village of Marlott in the vale of Blakemoor having fallen on evil days due to poverty could think of nothing but carrying things from the village to the market place to earn simple living and their wives yoked to the household drudgery of cooking, washing and cleaning. It was battle of life for the younger members of the family also. "Pedigree, ancestral skeletons, monumental record, the D'urberville lineament, did not help Tess in her life's battle." (p.16)

Jack Durbyfield went straight to an inn to gather strength for his journey the next day with "that load of beehives, which must be delivered". Later his wife also joined him. Tess being the eldest in the family realised what her parents were doing. If the beehives were not delivered there could be difficulty in maintaining the family comprising half a dozen children:

"All these young souls were passengers in the Durbyfield ship—— entirely dependent on the judgement of the two Durbyfield adults for their pleasures, their necessities, even their existence. If the heads of the Durbyfield household chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither were these half-dozen little captives under hatches compelled to sail with them." (p.24)

This is a picture not only of 'Nature's holy plan' but of the decadence of families under new economic pressures.

The Durbyfield couple were enjoying their drink at Rolliver's inn when Mrs. Durbyfield heard about a rich lady living at Trantridge, on the edge of the Chase, of the name of D'urberville. Thinking that the lady must be a relation she resolves to send Tess "to claim kin". What she meant was to send her daughter to the lady who could employ her in her service. Meanwhile poor Tess due to ill-health of her father was asked to
go to Casterbridge with the load of bee-hives. Unfortunately the carriage drawn by the old horse met an accident. The death of the horse apparently seemed to drive the family to dire poverty in future.

Tess had felt guilty of killing the horse and was willing to do anything to provide for the family. Hardy gives a touching description of Tess’s predicament in the family:

“As Tess grew older and began to see how matters stood, she felt quite a Malthusian toward her mother for thoughtlessly giving her so many little sisters and brothers, when it was such a trouble to nurse and provide for them—— However, Tess became humanely beneficent towards the smallness, and to help them as much as possible she used, as soon as she left school, to lend a hand at haymaking or harvesting on neighbouring farms; or, by preference, at milking or butter-making processes——” (pp.41-42)

Hardy’s reference to the famous British economist Malthus is quite apt in the context of Tess’s family. His theory of population stipulates that if population grows in geometric progression and food materials are procured in arithmetical progression, then the “preventive checks” of nature like famine, disease and death restore that balance. Tess was therefore compelled to meet the old Lady D’urberville despite protests from her and her father. But when she went there she met the young dandy, Alec D’urberville who assured her of a job in the service of his mother. He took her to the garden and entertained her with fruits and flowers. Tess’s mother was happy that she would not only get employment at the lady’s fowl- farm but also there could be hope of her marriage with Alec. Tess had no choice. “She had hoped to be a teacher at the school, but the fates seemed to decide otherwise——.” (p.55)
We find Tess on the horns of a dilemma when she sick of Alec's advancements, thinks of giving up her job. But, again, the poverty of the family haunts her. Hardy reflects:

"How could she face her parents, get back her box, and disconcert the whole scheme for the rehabilitation of her family on sentimental grounds." (p.67)

Alec knows about the poverty of Tess's family and succeeds in retaining her at his house by helping her parents. He lures her to see a countryside dance and later after a scuffle rescues her from some dirty women. But instead of taking her to her destination rides through the Chase, "the oldest wood in England". It is in this forest where he molestes Tess. She would not have suffered physical and mental agony if poverty of the family and foolish dreams of her mother for social escalation had not brought her to Alec's house.

Hardy presents to us a grim spectacle of decaying villages where it was becoming difficult to meet both ends together. Young damsels who should have been at school were forced to work in fields and at farms. Tess proved worthy of her mettle again. She faced her poverty and consoled herself with the idea of a new future. She finally accepted the job of a dairymaid at Talbothays for summer.

Tess was relieved of her tensions at the Dairy. She had good company of young girls. The light air in the valley of the Great Dairies was nature's free gift to rejuvenate her. Mr. Crick, the dairyman was a good person and he took care of the working girls. He had Angel Clare as a pupil who was undergoing some training at the Dairy to become a
farmer. Hardy projects his own view of education and social ideas through Clare:

"He spent years and years in desultory studies, undertakings and meditations; he began to evince considerable indifference to social forms and observances. The material distinctions of rank and wealth he increasingly despised. Early association with country solitudes had bred in him an unconquerable and almost unreasonable aversion to modern town life. He valued even more than a competency intellectual liberty." (pp.150-151)

Clare was a native of Wessex. Though he belonged to a Clergyman's family he retained the best virtues of natural life in him. As against Alec who was an alien in this countryside, Clare detested showy and loose living. His attraction to Tess was quite natural. Unlike Farfrae in The Mayor Casterbridge he was not lured by wealth of any woman. He was a loving person. He even showed gallantry to the working maids when he helped them cross the pool of water by carrying them over his shoulders. But his love for Tess grew from day to day till they were united in wedlock.

As long as Clare was courting Tess and dreaming of going abroad, the problem of economic welfare did not worry him. But soon after the revelation by his wife about her past relations with Alec, this problem assumed urgency for him. Leaving Tess behind, despite her pleas and protestation he set out for Brazil. Now in the age of transition, thousands of English men were migrating to British Colonies in America, Africa and Asia but Clare's case was slightly different. He did not have the moral courage to accept Tess for fear of social degradation. His departure meant misery for Tess. Her parents and the family were already suffering the pangs of poverty. Tess again gathered courage. For sometime she worked at a dairy near Port-Bredy. Later she engaged herself at a farm at the time
of harvesting. Both these assignments were temporary. On the home front things were growing from bad to worse. Her mother asked for some money for thatching the house before rains. She sent twenty pounds from the money that Clare had given her as a parting gift.

Tess’s case was worse than a daily wager. She moved from farm to farm for job and shelter till she reached Flintcomb-Ash farm which was really “a starve-acre place.” Here Tess and other labour “worked on hour after hour, unconscious of the forlorn aspect they bore in the landscape, not thinking of the justice or injustice of their lot.”(p.364) Farmer Groby behaved as a cruel tyrant because he was all the time thinking of the actual work done in the fields.

It was during those miserable days at Flintcomb Ash that Alec D’urberville, the convert, came back to Tess with new proposals of reconciliation. She was sick of her work. Clare had not written to her. Her meeting with his parents at the vicarage was not possible. The condition of her family at the new place was really bad. All these circumstances forced Tess to accept Alec’s proposal. After all he was her husband in the physical sense though not in the legal sense. This is what poverty does to poor and neglected of the earth. It dehumanises them beyond redemption.

III

At the fag-end of his career as a novelist Hardy was inclined to address his fellow men ------ ‘suffering is the badge of thy tribe’. But as to the causes responsible for this suffering he was not quite sure------ whether it was chance or fate or the working of unseen powers or human
institutions or all these together. He dramatised situations in the lives of
his men and women to suggest that Adam's offspring is not entirely free in
deciding its destiny. *Tess of the D'urbervilles* deals with some of these
aspects of human life in a convincing way.

Tess was born in a poor family. She had to give up her studies to
earn some money. It was her fate that made her a farm labourer and a
milk-maid rather than a school teacher. When circumstances forced her to
accept a job at the Chase, she was victimised by Alec D'urberville. After
her rape, Hardy reflects:

"----- Where was Tess's guardian angel? Where was the providence
of her simple faith? Perhaps ----- he was talking or he was pursuing,
or he was in a journey or he was sleeping and not to be awaked.
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-----"
(pp.90-91)

When her mother heard about this misfortune of her daughter, she
accepted it with stoic resignation:

"Well, we must make the best of it, I suppose.
'Tis nater, after all, and what do please God" (p.104)

Tess is made of a different stuff than her mother. Yet she thinks that
fortune seldom smiles on her. She enjoys music, good books and natural
scenery but cannot avoid melancholy thoughts. At Talbothays she meets
Clare whose sad notes on his harp attract her attention. He was rather
serious about 'this hobble of being alive'. Tess is not so philosophical
about human tragedy. She sees the world in her own mirror. When Clare
asked her the reason of her sorrow, she simply replied:
Tess feels that life is not a bed of roses. Some have more thorns in their flesh than they could endure. It's all luck. She tells Clare how those who deserve do not get and those who get do not deserve. She illustrates this statement with reference to herself and three friends at the Dairy. Izz, Marian and Ratty suffered pangs of love:

"They were simple and innocent girls on whom the unhappiness of unrequited love had fallen; they had deserved better at the hands of Fate. She had deserved worse — yet she was the chosen one." (p.284)

After the unhappiness of marriage with Clare and his departure to Brazil, Tess was hounded and threatened by Alec. She considered it her lot to suffer and suffer till her last breath:

"Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim — that's the law." (p.423)

There is another law. In her case it became operative when at Sandbourne where she was living with Alec, her deepest sentiment were hurt intentionally. Consequently she killed her seducer and tormentor before he could say his prayers. But she herself received punishment for the murder:

"Justice was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess." (p.508)

When *Tess* appeared in serial Hardy had to accommodate the moral and religious views and the social values dear to his readers. Yet the "explosive nature" of the material caused great upheaval in certain literary
and religious circles. To be fair to Hardy there is no consistent discussion on faith, ritual, beliefs in the novel. There are, however, certain ‘impressions’ which the author conveyed through his characters. They must be appreciated in their context and not out of context.

In the very beginning of the novel we meet a certain Parson Tringham who took more interest in history and archeology than in scriptures. His discovery of the origin of the Durbyfield family led to the ruin of Tess and her family members. When she was driving the carriage to Casterbridge market along with her brother she uttered something unusual for her age and understanding. Yet it was quite symbolic of the tragedy that was to befall her. Explaining to her brother the nature of stars in the universe she observed that some of them were splendid and others “a little blighted.” Our earth on which we live was considered ‘a blighted one.’ The death of the horse proved the validity of this view of life. Her own fall from ‘grace’, the birth and death of Sorrow and other such incidents provide the material for a world not fit for the abode of the innocent.

Like the new sowing, reaping and threshing machines responsible for bringing revolutionary changes in agriculture, new interpretations of scriptures by various schools of Christianity left many ‘faithless’. Intellectuals like Arnold’s Scholar Gipsy found themselves on the darkling plains while those like Hardy’s friend Horace Moule stuck to Newman. Angel Clare was a product of the same period of shifting faith. He refused to follow in the footsteps of his father, Rev. James Clare and was not interested in taking a Cambridge degree in theology. He expressed his views to his father very clearly:
“I should prefer not to take orders. I fear I could not conscientiously do so. I love the church as one loves a parent — but I cannot honestly be ordained her minister, as my brothers are, while she refuses to liberate her mind from an untenable redemptive theolatry — My whole instinct in matters of religion is towards reconstruction.” (p.149)

Hardy’s own liberal views about religion and love of community led him to think of liberation from orthodoxy. Clare’s father was a spiritual descendant in the direct line from Wycliff, Luther and Calvin, an ‘Evangelical of the Evangelicals’. But his son was something of an aesthete and took pagan pleasures in natural life. Once in a moment of irritation he had said to his father: “it might have resulted far better for mankind if Greece had been the source of the religion of modern civilization, and not Palestine.” Clare’s religious ideas were shattered after the confession of his wife. His behaviour could be called anything but moral or religious. No forgiveness for the sinner, even though he himself was guilty of the same sin early in youth.

The preaching community is held to ridicule by Hardy when Tess visits the vicarage on a Sunday noon to seek help of Clare’s parents. She put her boots in a nearby hedge and waited for the inmates to return from church service. Meanwhile the Clerical brother were seen holding discourse on Clare’s “ill-considered marriage” and one of them probed the hedge carefully with his umbrella, and dragged something to light. Hardy ridicules the prying eyes of the clergyman to detect other’s weaknesses but not their own. One of the brothers who detected Tess’s boots observed:

‘Here’s a pair of old boots —— Thrown away, I suppose, by some tramp or other’. Their companion Miss Mercy Chant
agreed: 'some impostor who wished to come into the town barefoot, perhaps, and so excite our sympathies ——. I'll carry them for some poor person.' (p. 383)

"Poor Tess confounded by discourses of clerical brothers chose not to meet Clare’s parents. She, however, had another experience with a religious zealot. Finding the street deserted she enquired on old woman about it. Her reply bears out how the common folk detest the ranting preachers:

"They be all gone to hear the preaching in your barn. A ranter preaches there between the services ——. An excellent, fiery, Christian man, they say. But Lord, I don't go to hear 'n. What comes in the regular way over the pulpit is hot enough for I." (p. 385)

The preacher in this case was the dandy Alec D’urberville who had specialized in hood winking the common people by narrating his spiritual experiences.

Tess slipped away from the scene but the “Convert” pursued her to the Flintcomb Ash farm. He told her that he had changed under the influence of Rev. Clare. In sheer disgust Tess asked him not to brag about his religions posture:

"I can't believe in such sudden things! I feel indignant with you for talking to me like this, when you know——when you know what harm you've done me! You, and those like you take your fill of pleasure on earth by making the life of such as me bitter and black with sorrow; and then it is a fine thing, when you have had enough of that, to think of securing you pleasure in heaven by becoming converted. Out upon such —— I don't believe in you—— I hate it." (p. 394)
Alec was undaunted by Tess's harsh words. Charmed by her beauty he forgot all about scriptures and Christianity:

"I thought I worshipped on the mountains, but I find I still serve in the graves —— I ask myself, am I, indeed one of those "servants of corruption" who, "after they have escaped the pollution of the world, are again entangled therein and overcome ——."

And why then have 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—You temptress Tess you dear damned witch of Babylon —— I could not resist you as soon as I met you again." (p.411)

Alec's religious mania ended soon. At last his life's goal was achieved when he trapped Tess for the second time and made her his mistress at the fashionable watering place, Sandbourne. But nemesis was not far off and he paid the penalty of his misdeeds in life.

Angel Clare's religious and moral ideas underwent a sea-change when he reached Brazil. Hardy tells us that away from England his physical sufferings and mental tensions made him a different man:

"What arrested him now as of value in life was less its beauty than its pathos. Having long discredited the old systems of mysticism, he now began to discredit the old appraisements of morality. He thought they wanted readjusting, who was the moral man? Still more pertinently who was the moral woman? The 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."(p.433)

Viewing Tess in these lights, a regret for his hasty judgement began to oppress him. He literally went to her as a mendicant begging her forgiveness. In her present mood she rejected his plea to accept him. But
her true love for Clare welled up when she killed Alec for insulting her husband. 'Fulfilment' phase of the novel shows how the two genuine lovers were re-united after their ordeals.

David Lodge in his excellent essay "Tess, Nature, and the Voice of Hardy" observed that in *Tess of the D'urbervilles* Hardy appears "as a combination of sceptical philosopher, and local historian, topographer, antiquarian, mediating between his ‘folk’----- the agricultural community of Wessex ----- and his readers ----- the metropolitan ‘quality’". The sensitive reader could appreciate Hardy’s great art only when he views the myriad interests of the novel in plot construction, characterizations, dramatization of situations, depiction of natural sceneries and in exposition of a heightened sense of social consciousness and moral responsibility. In certain respects more powerful than Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, Hardy’s book invited unprecedented hostility from the press and the pulpit. Hardy called all those who criticized him for the so-called ‘immorality’ in *Tess* as ‘mere imbeciles’ who would not entertain any new idea either in life or literature. But the author maintained that books like *Tess* had a bracing effect on sensitive minds. Defending Hardy against the antagonistic views of some contemporary reviewers, D. F. Hannigan observed in *Westminster Review* (December, 1892):

"The author of *Tess* may rest on his laurels. He has revolutionized English fiction. His book is a success, and Mrs. Grundy and her numerous votaries must hide their heads in shame." 18

17 R.P. Draper, *Thomas Hardy: The Tragic Novels*, p.170
18 *The Creative Heritage*, p.248
As a classic in English fiction *Tess* has appealed to generations of readers. It has not lost its relevance even in modern times. The socio-ethical dimensions of the novel amply reveal the author’s deep sympathy for ‘the poor’ of the earth. In short, Hardy may be said to have employed his creative powers to illumine certain areas of darkness in English life which help in the amelioration of mankind.