

The Role of Fate in the Life of Tess in *Tess, the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy

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Abstract – The principal objective of the present paper is to show the tragic as well as horrific role of the fate in life of Tess, a protagonist in *Tess, The D'Urbervilles* (1992) by Thomas Hardy. Tess is a female protagonist in the novel, who suffers a lot in her life not because of her crime or sin but due to her unfortunate life which is completely under the control of fate. The novel shows that she has to face the wrath of fate or destiny for being a nice human being in the world of inhumanity. In the whole story of the novel, Tess does not commit any crime or sin but she has to face her tragic experience and end of her life in the family as well as outside the family. She is just presented as a victim of fate. It seems that all the disastrous and inhuman incidents of her life are controlled and pre-decided by the fate. Despite being a pure woman, she does not witness and experience a few moment of happiness in her whole life.

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INTRODUCTION

There are numberless characters in the history of English literature which are remembered for worst and tragic experiences in their lives, which make them unforgettable characters. It is not that they are remembered for the supernatural or extraordinary characteristics but they are remembered for real and human-like characters whose circumstances are directly or indirectly related to human being in the real world. One of these tragic characters is Tess in *Tess, The D'Urbervilles* (1992) by Thomas Hardy. *Tess, The D'Urbervilles* is one of those renowned literary works of Hardy which revolve around the adverse and significant developments which shape and shake the discourse of the life of protagonist. The present novel is not exceptional to such events and developments. Hardy is also remembered for various unique novels which occupy remarkable place in the history of English literature for different social issues. It is a difficult as well as impossible task to define and limit themes of his novels to just a single theme because Hardy deals with a variety of different themes in his acknowledged novels. The *Tess, The D'Urbervilles* is far-fetching literary creation. The novel is unique in its deep presentation of phases of developments of the female protagonist of the novel named Tess who is the soul of the novel because without whom novel is definitely useless and directionless.

The important aspect of the novel which makes Tess unforgettable and significant is the role of fate. The novel apparently shows the role of the fate in the life of Tess who becomes victim of the so-called grip of fate. When the readers read the novel, they feel that every phase of Tess's life is controlled by the fate. Whatever she does in her life to depend and improve her

impoverished condition has no positive result because everything is preplanned and fixed in her life by the fate. The life of Tess is adversely affected by the fate from the very beginning of the novel to the end. It is clearly shown and observed that there is no single moment and event in the novel where there is no roll of fate in her life. This is the point which brings tears in the eyes of the reader because other characters in the novel experience some relief and moment of happiness in their lives but Tess is exceptional as there is no end of her sorrows. It would not be wrong to say that the character of Tess would always be remembered for her unlimited sorrows and role of fate in her life. To observe the role of fate in her life, it will be very helpful and beneficial to divide the life of Tess in phases to understand the role which the fate plays.

The life of Tess can be divided among various phases due to her various traumatic circumstances in her life but it would be easy to limit life of Tess to three phases ranging from her life in parental home, separation from her parents and lover and finally her end of life. Tess belongs to a poor family in which she is the eldest daughter on whom the whole responsibility of home banks on. Being an eldest daughter in the family, she has to take care of her younger brother and sister along with the chores of the home. On the other hand her father is a drunkard who does not care for family as well as for Tess. He does not do anything to improve her impoverished conditions. Tess very well knows all about her father's irresponsible behaviour. So she decides to help her family in the family business. Her decision to help in the family shows her responsible behavior to uplift the family's socio-economic conditions. When Tess comes to know about her drunkard condition of her

father, she immediately realizes that her father is physically as well mentally unable to deliver the load of beehives in the market in a few hour. Subsequently she decides to take the load of beehive to the market as soon as possible. But she does not know that something unwanted event is coming to shake her family life. When Tess and her brother names Abraham go to market, their horse name Prince collides with the local mail cart and the horse dies in this incident. On other words, it can be said that the death of the horse is sign of the coming of bad and unwanted time for Tess which is not in her favour. After the death of the horse, their economic circumstances become more worse and poor. Her family condition can be observed when she say; "Tis all my doing – all mine! No excuse for me – none. What will mother and father live on now? Aby, Aby! We can't go on with our load – Prince is killed!" (Hardy 72). This is the first phase of her life which gets ended with death of Prince. The ending of this phase leads the life of Tess towards the second phase which is full of struggle and sorrows which get ended with death of Tess.

After the death of the horse, Tess has to do job in the house of 'Mrs. d'Urberville to support her family economically. Tess accepts the truth and says "Well, as I killed the horse, mother; I suppose I ought to do something. I don't mind going and seeing her, but you must leave it to me about asking for help. And don't go thinking about her making a match for me – it is silly" (Hardy 75). Initially she feels hesitation going to the house of Mrs. D'Urderville but she does not have any other option to make her family survive. When she reaches the destination, she first meets Alec who is a beast in the form of human being. He does not think that there is a lot of gap between Tess and him in the context of age. At the first sight of Tess, Alec becomes attractive towards her beautiful and magnetic physical appearance. Tess does not get realized that she is being entangled in the seductive plan of Alec. Every Alec also accepts the truth regarding his character and says "I can say no more. I suppose I am bad fellow – a damn bad fellow. I was born bad, and I have lived bad, and I shall die bad in all probability" (Hardy 125). She is too young to recognize this tricky plan of Alec. Whenever she is busy in works of his home, Alec tries to molest and seduce her to satisfy his physical appetite; his attempts are foiled and resisted by her. But the main question is that how much longer she can resist his seductive attempt because she works in his home and is surrounded by him all the time. He is always in search of finding her in the lonely place where no one can stop him to fill full his sexual needs. There are numbers of occasions when Alec finds her alone but fails due to unwanted reasons. Sometime he endeavours to show his feeling of love for her but Tess knows that he does not love her but he is attracted toward her physical beauty. Alec also says that he will definitely marry with her if she gets agreed to make physical relationship with him. His all attempts to woo her get failed.

Finally Alec succeeds in his attempt when he finds Tess with her friends when they are coming from some party outside from D'Urbervilles. Tess along with her friends is drunkard and enjoying each other's company. When Alec meets on the road reading him home, he thinks that this is right time to entangle her in his plan. Initially Tess resists his offer of dropping her to the destination but finally he persuades her to go with him. But she does know that fate has decided something ominous for her disaster on the way. She is even not in condition in which she can out and out prevent his seductive plan. She is seduced by Alec. When she is being seduced, she does know what is happening with her. When Tess explains about her poor condition to mother by saying that "How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house for months ago. Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hand against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance of learning in that way, and you did not help me" (Hardy 131). No one is there to help her. She decides to leave her job in the D'Urbervilles.

But her unpreventable sorrows do not end here. The problem becomes worse when she is unable to hide her pregnancy. She is persuaded to abort her child but being a mother she cannot abort his child whom she loves very much. She knows the bitter truth that she as well as his child will not be accepted in the family and society. It is comparatively worse for a girl who is not married. Without a marriage, having a child is sin and crime according to society. In case of Tess, she has committed both crime but no one knows the truth. By hook and crook, she succeeds in giving birth to her child. But her child is not healthy. Sometime it seems that God is against her will to give birth to her child. After some days her baby child dies due to some health problems. The intensity of her sorrow increases when the priest denies performing the last rituals and rites of her dead child. No one helps and supports her because supporting and performing the last rites of the deceased child whose father is not known is considered to be sin and unsocial practice in the established codes of society because the so-called masters of society has established the codes of society. If these codes of society are breached by anyone, he/her has to face the wrath of society. So no one helps her. But she does not want her child to leave this world without the rituals because she believes that without such so-called rituals, the child would not get place in the heaven. So she performs the all the rituals of her dead child on her own.

Something more worse is waiting for her when she decides to leave home in the search job to sustain and support her family economically. In this phase some moments of happiness are witnessed in her life when she meets Angel Clare who works in the diary fare. Angel Clare is a handsome and attractive man whom almost all the women like him but he gets attracted towards the beauty of Tess. To some extent he falls in love with her at the first sight of her beauty. There is no doubt that it is this short period of time

when she feels happiness after long time of depression. This happy moment with Angel Clare does not long for last because her past life is hovering over her like a ghost. Whenever she stays time with Clare, she unsuccessfully tries to tell him about her past life but cannot tell as she feels fear and believes Clare would leave her after knowing the truth of her life. Sometime she thinks that Clare would not leave her as she has done nothing wrong. The incident of pregnancy is just a mistake done by Alec. But being a true woman, Tess does not want to hide anything from him. Before they get married she writes all about her past life in the letter and lefts the letter in the room of Angel Clare so that he does not feel that she has betrayed him in love. But unfortunately Clare does not get the letter and both get married. Both the characters feel happy after marriage and go out for honeymoon. When they are on the top of their happiness, suddenly a storm of destruction comes in their lives and destroys their married life when both the characters decide to tell about their past secrets. Tess undoubtedly accepts his secret regarding his affairs with a girl. The situation completely gets turned when she tell him that Alec impregnates her in her past life. She explain all the circumstances under which she has to undergo but Angel Clare does not bear this bitter truth and says to her regarding her unavoidable past experience that "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?" (Hardy 298) and decides to leave Tess on right now. She begs to him not to leave and tries to explain her perspective by saying that:

What I have done – what have I done! I have not told of anything that interferes with or belies my love for you. You don't think I planned it, do you? It is in your mind what you are angry at, Angle: it is not in me. O, it is not in me, and I am not that deceitful woman you think me!" (Hardy 302)

But he does not listen to her and lefts her on her on condition. Moreover her devotion of love towards him can be observed when she lets him to decide what should be her punishment and says "I agree to the condition, Angel; because you know best what my punishment ought to be; only – only – don't make it more than I can bear!"(Hardy 324). Even he does not think what would happen with her when he leaves her. From here the phase of second life as well as her moment of happiness gets ended her and starts her last phase of suffering and death.

This is last phase of her life when her suffering and pain reach the culmination from where is no turning point in her life. When Angel Clare leaves Tess, She starts believing that her husband would come to her one day and they would unite forever. There is no doubt that they get united for some time. When Clare is far away in Brazil, she writes many letters to explain her traumatic and disastrous circumstances in which she

has to live for long time. Alec comes again in her again to marry her. He is very possessive towards Tess and cannot bear any person in the life of Tess. When he comes to know about the current status of her life, he enters into her life again and offers her for marriage but she denies the offer. His interference does not end here. He is oblivious of the fact that Tess tells Clare about her suffering through the medium of letter. So he hides all the letters written by Tess to Clare so that Clare does not the circumstances in which Tess has to undergo. To some extent, Alec gets succeeded in his plan of hiding her letters.

Now the stage has come beyond which she cannot wait for Alec but he does not come to her. But the irony is that she does not know that her letters does to not reach to the destination. Finally she takes the decision of marriage and accepts the offer of Alec. She knows the truth that she does not love Alec but to sustain her life she has to marry Alec. Moreover she does not have other option except marrying him. If Angel Clare does not decide to leave alone, no such condition would arise. Even Tess is not responsible for all this. Her frustration and pain towards Angel becomes clear when she reads the line which she write in the letter to Angel by saying:

"O why have you treated me so monstrously, Angel! I do not deserve it. I have thought it all over carefully, and I can never, never forgive you! You know that I did not inte3nd to wrong you – why have you so wronged me? You are cruel, cruel indeed! I will try to forget you. I is all injustice I have received at your hands!" (Hardy 440)

If Tess can undoubtedly accept Clare's affair with a girl, then why Clare does not accept her truth of life regarding her pregnancy.

Finally Tess marries with Alec and leads an unsuccessfully married life. Suddenly a new and disturbing turn knocks at the door of her life when Angel Clare appears in the life of Tess. Both Angle Clare and Tess get surprise to see each other because both have no hope of see and meet each other again. When he comes to know that she is wife of Alec, he does not say anything and accepts the truth. Again Clare decides to leave her with Alec to lead a married life. After meeting with Clare, she goes to her bedroom. When she opens the drawer, she gets surprised to see the letter in the box which she writes to Clare. Now she completely fathoms the all situation that Clare does not come to her because the letters she writes do not reach to Clare. Alec hides all the letters. She believes that Alec is all responsible for all her suffering from the very beginning to end. Now she decides to take revenge from Alec and kills him in rage. After killing Alec, Tess meets with Angel Clare and spends some memorable moment with him. She tries to make the last of her meeting with

him a memorable moment because she knows the truth after this house she would definitely not be able to continue her life with him due to the murder of Alec. Finally she is hanged for murdering him.

After observing all the tragic and sorrowful experience of Tess, it can easily be concluded that the life of Tess is controlled and directed by the fate. Every aspect of her life is preplanned by fate or destiny. From the very beginning of her life she does not experience a single day of happiness in her life. It would not be wrong to say that Tess is one of most memorable tragic and unfortunate characters in the history of English literature. While reading the story of Tess, the readers do not feel that they are just reading about a fictional character in the novel. Undoubtedly her unstoppable suffering and endless pain make her unique character. More painful thing in the novel is that she is not responsible for any wrong doing but she has to face and experience excessive and unjustified situations in her life. In other words, fate performs a significant role in the life of a pure woman. She does not left any stone unturned to change her fate but she do not know that she is nothing but just a pawn in the hand of fate. It may be said that goodness in her character is responsible for her suffering because she gets failed to understand the nature of human. Whatever the reason is behind her pain, it is clear that the experiences of life under which she has to undergo are traumatic and disastrous.

REFERENCES

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