

## ECONOMIC REALITIES, CLASSICISM AND EXPLOITATION: A MARXIST STUDY OF THOMAS HARDY'S NOVEL TESS OF D'URBERVILLES

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### ABSTRACT

*Economics play a pivotal role in Hardy's novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles. The present study justifies Marx's views that deriving and keeping economic benefits is the motive behind every social and political activity. The research justifies Marx's idea pertaining to human nature that life before anything needs, food and shelter and these are the prime urges around which Tess' tragedy revolves. Throughout her life she had been treated as a commodity, a means of deriving economic benefit. Her doom lies not in her exploitation by the aristocrat Alec but actual calamity fell on her when the family horse, the only breadwinner died. After this, chains of events occurred which lead Tess towards her doom. The research unveils that Classicism is the most prevailing ideology that determines the worth of an individual according to the class he / she belongs. Tess doom lies in her deteriorating economic condition and poor social rank. Another significant issue that the research posture is that marriage is considered as a mean to gain economic stability. The research shows exploitation and victimization of Proletariat in forms of surplus labor and fluctuating length of working day.*

**Keywords:** Economics, Classicism, Surplus Labor, Exploitation

### INTRODUCTION

The present research "Economic Realities, Classicism and Exploitation: A Marxist study of Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of D'Urbervilles" presents a different perspective of the tragedy of Tess. Marxist theory provides a penetrating insight in all human, activities encompassing from history to present including human relations and states that economics is the foundation on which every human activity, relations and happening stay.

### SCOPE/ AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The present research is aimed to unveil that the tragedy of Tess is shaped not by her seduction but by the economic crisis of her family. Critical analysis brings forth that classicism (Discrimination on the basis of class) has also a vital role in Tess life. Alec exploited her considering himself the master of the poor creature. In the light of Marxist theory research pose a serious issue that marriage is a solution to financial crisis. The research provides an in depth study of human activities and analyzes treatment of Tess as commodity by her family, Angle and her employers. The prime objective of the research is to unveil that behind every incident that led Tess towards her doom the reason was wretched and constantly declining economic conditions. The research unfolds working class exploitation in form of surplus labor and fluctuating length of working day.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present research is aimed to answer the following questions

1. What role do economic conditions play in framing the tragedy of Tess?
2. How does the text project Engel's idea of Marriage as a mean to attain economic stability?
3. How the text manifests and invites the researcher to criticize class tension and classicism (a repressive ideology) and treatment of Tess as a commodity?
4. How the novel can be seen as a critique of capitalism with respect to exploitation of proletariat in form of surplus labor and fluctuating length of working day?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Marxism a theory which states all social and economic changes are the result of change in economic conditions. Getting and keeping economic power is the motive behind every change. Marx states that all ideologies that govern human life spring from the material aspect of life. In order to understand the world and its affairs one needs to understand the economic conditions of that time. According to Marxist's theory difference in possessions and property divide people in different groups called classes (Tyson 54). Difference on the basis of class is even more glaring than the difference on the basis of caste, creed and color. The real line of demarcation is based on possessions.

Ideology which Marx called to a system of beliefs is the key concept in Marxist theory. History is the witness that ideologies exhibit the interest and benefits of one class which is socially and economically dominant (Abrams 148). With the emergence of capitalism the dominant ideologies favor the bourgeoisie and exploit proletariat. The same point Marx discusses in his *The German Ideology* says that the ruling class as it dominates the material circumstances and economics of the state they are the ones who generate and regulate the ideas in society. This system would never change unless the society leaves off its need of a ruling class.

Classicism is a ruling ideology that divides people in different classes on the basis of possessions .Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* undertook the task of tracing human history from Marxist perspective and they asserted that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle" and these division and social ranks are not unique to the present world it existed even in Romans times in middle ages in the form of feudal lords and their slaves and subject. Present world of capitalism projects the same discrimination as Bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Marx critical insight shows the debilitating impacts of capitalism on human behavior and psychology. In capitalism the worth of a commodity lays lies not in the usage but in the money and other commodities with which it can be exchanged or sold (exchange value). The worth of a commodity can also be determined by the social impact the commodity awards to its bearer (sign exchange value). Now in capitalist culture these treatments are given to human and human relationships (Tyson 62)

Usage of laborer as commodity is very much prevalent in capitalism. Bourgeoisie who control the power resources exploits the proletariat in various forms like surplus labor and inconsistent length of working day. According to Marx length of a working day is not fixed "it is not constant but a variable quantity"(Marx, Economic manuscript). Bourgeois put in excess labor for which they are not paid is surplus labor and with this surplus labor bourgeois make limitless profits.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative research mode has been employed for probing and critical analysis of the research statement. By Qualitative inquiry the researcher can study and analyze the peculiar behaviors' and mindsets and also the causes and reasons that stimulate, persuade or govern that behaviors. It considers each and every individual of the study significant. It enables the researcher to have an in depth and critical study of the individuals, society and incidents.

## **DISCUSSION**

Tess of D'Urbervilles is essentially a Marxist novel that truly depicts the plight and predicament of a girl under extreme economic crisis and poverty. Critical analysis unsnarls class tension and projects Tess of D'Urbervilles as the victim of upper class. As many critics believe that Tess tragedy lays in her seduction at the hands of Alec the aristocratic exploiter of Tess. But critical probing from Marxist perspective unveils many aspects that show the forces that pushed Tess towards her doom.

### **Material Circumstances of Tess' Home**

Tess the maternal circumstances or economic conditions of Tess' home were miserable. Jack Durbeyfield the head of the family was a haggler and was not a consistent worker. Being an extremely irresponsible person, many times he could not go to his work owing to the intoxication of the drink he used to take at Rollovers inn. There were eight members in the family and were poorly fed as there was no permanent source of income. There was a reign of poverty in her home. When Jack Durbeyfield discovered the superiority of his lineage, out of happiness he got drunk and was not able to go to his work. Tess being the most responsible knew the fact that her father would not go to the market and wait for the next week and they will have to suffer economic loss member agreed to go to market. On the way to her how collided with a morning cart resulted in the death of Prince (the horse). She was awestruck and the immediate thought that came to her mind was that how her family would survive "the bread winner had been taken away from them, what they would do" (Hardy 40) as the haggling business was completely dependent on horse.

### **The Impact of Prince's Death**

It was the death of Prince that brought calamity on Tess. Had the horse not been killed due to her lapse she would not have been a tragic figure. She considered herself the murderess of the family's bread winner and was impatient to repay the loss by hook or by crook. This was the sole incident that compelled Tess to go to Tantridge and claim kin to the stock D'Urbervilles. Her mother said you must go and claim kin and "ask for some help in our trouble"(Hardy 41)

Tess' sense of integrity and self honor did not permit her to beg help and she said that she would prefer to get work (Hardy 41). Death of the family horse, penury and distress in the home were the stimulants that pushed Tess towards her doom.

## **ECONOMIC CONDITIONS CAUSE RISE AND FALL**

Marx believed that "all human events have material / economic causes. The novel projects their idea that rise and fall shall not be associated Parson Tringham when he informed Jack Durbey field about his high ancestry. Looking Jack as member of high noble family in such a shabby and poor condition, he said "How are the mighty fallen" (Hardy 15) and Jack realizing his economic decline said that he had heard that his family had been very prosperous and "they had seen better days. We had once kept two horses where we now keep

only one” (Hardy 15). The novel shows that rise and fall, good days and bad ones all are dependent on material possessions.

### **Marriage: Necessary for Economic Stability**

The lack in material wealth of the Durbeyfield forced person to say marriage necessary for economic stability. Engels in his “*Origin of the Family, Private Property and State*” opines that with the increase in wealth, earning associated with male and female became dependent on male so marriage became necessary for economic stability(Engels ). As Marx stated that all human activities are driven by economic needs, Marriage became necessary for female on economic basis. Hardy presents the idea in the novel and shows Joan Durbeyfield’s engagements in making matches for Tess was the result of her desire of winning a prosperous lot for her daughter. The idea of economic firmness of females lies in marriage is so much penetrated in the society that even Tess younger brother Abraham in his fancy links Tess economic progress with her marriage “If Tess were made rich by marrying a gentleman, She would have enough money to buy a spyglass” (Hardy. 37)

### **Tess: A Commodity for Her Family**

Tess parents treated her as commodity as they expected material benefits from Tess. They sent Tess to D’Urbervilles not only to claim kinship but to secure a better life for her whole family. “Great things may come out of it” (Hardy P. 27) .Her family focused on the things that Tess can bring to them. As a businessman make his commodity attractive so that he can attract the buyers in the same manner Tess mother adorned her before sending her to Tantridge. Her mother was sure that Tess can pave her way and better the economic conditions of her family she uses her trump card in the right manner. On being asked what is her trump card she simply say “her face” this remark of Joan shows that she was using her daughter as a vehicle to improve her own economic condition. Throughout the novel, the family treats her like an object. After the exploitation at the hands of Alec, when she returned home she was rebuked by her mother that why she has come back instead of sympathizing with her daughter in such distress and agony she said “Why did not think of doing something good for your family”(Hardy. 93)

Joan Durbeyfield raised her daughter in a hope that after getting married to a gentleman she would free her family from the clutches of poverty.

### **Tess: a commodity for angel**

Critical analysis of the novel unveils a pivotal aspect about Angel’s love. His love for Tess lies in his personal benefits. The motive behind his marriage with Tess lies in his practical approach towards love. He also treated Tess as commodity as his decision for marrying Tess lies in the fact that she was a working lady, a milk maid. He had observed her skills and labor at Talbothey Dairy. “I shall soon want to marry and being a farmer I shall require for my wife a woman who knows all about the management of farm. Will you be that woman Tessy” (Hardy.p.188). When he went to meet his parents and discussed about his marriage he laid great emphasis upon the fact that the basic purpose of choosing Tess is that he is a farmer and he needs a wife who should be a skilled worker who can shoulder his burden. He rejected Mercy chant because she was a lady and doctor of religion she could not be a proper wife for a farmer.

### **Portrayal of Classicism**

This ideology holds upper / elite class as naturally superior to the lower ones. Class plays a prime and pivotal role in framing the tragedy of Tess. The root of the tragedy lies in Tess' father's discovery that he belongs to the superior knightly family of D'Urbervilles. This sudden elevation of his class made him pompous and boasting he asked a boy and gave him a shilling in order to fetch him a carriage as a person belonging to such high class travels not on feet but in a carriage. As soon as the little boy come to know about Durbeyfield's upgraded social rank he called him "Yes, Sir John, anything else I can do for'ee Sir John?" (Hardy, 17) The boy added an honorific "Sir" to his name that shows the class consciousness of Victorian era. When Joan Durbeyfield read the letter in which Mrs. D'Urbervilles wrote that a spring-cart would be sent for Tess. She became conscious and said why a cart? We are relatives belonging to the same social class. Why a carriage would not be sent. These remarks of Mrs. Durbeyfield show her consciousness of class.

When Angel discussed his matters of marriage with his family, the mother's immediate question was "is she a lady?" (Hardy 181) Tess remained in an inferiority complex throughout her life owing to her low class. Even after giving her consent in favor of Angel she remained suspicious of their marriage once, she asked Angel that was he not ashamed of owning her as his wife in front of the world (Hardy. 212) she was conscious that marriage with a milkmaid could harm his dignity and pervert the nobility of his family.

### Fall of Tess From Lower Class to Underclass

Tess' tragedy lays in the ceaseless struggle which she did throughout her life to support and secure a better living for her family. Though Tess belongs to lower class but the declining economic conditions let her fall even down from lower to underclass.

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<i>TESS REPRESENTING LOWER CLASS</i>	<i>TESS REPRESENTING UNDERCLASS</i>
1. Had a horse (a means of earning).	Death of horse (lost a breadwinner)
2. Had a home to live in.	Became homeless after her father's death.

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### SURPLUS LABOUR AND EXPLOITATION OF PROLEARIAT

Hardy has depicted this surplus labor the hard manual labor done by Tess from dawn to dusk she was taken excessive labor because the owner was the same man who was beaten by Angel on account of humiliating Tess. She had to feed the thresher, bind and carry the load to shift it to difference places. It was ceaselessness of the work which tired her so much and she began repent that would that she had never come to flint comb ash! (Hardy 347). The land owner was a stone man as Tess called him, such cruel man who treated Tess like animals. The land owner ordered her a difficult task of cleaning the barn. He knew that it is difficult for a girl to do it and it would require a hard labor and too much time. "I am going to work all the afternoon instead of leaving at two" (Hardy 310). That shows Marxist concept of surplus labor, excessive length of working day according to bourgeoisie own advantage and exploitation of proletariat.

### Tess: The Victim of Upper Class

Tess was not only the Aristocrat Alec she was equally the victim of well established Angel. Both the members of established class left Tess economically deteriorated and resulted in the loss of her job. When she was exploited by Alec, heartbroken Tess returned home back and lost a means of earning. Tess' victimization started from the day when she went in his carriage to the D'Urbervilles mansion. Being an aristocrat and materialistically in strong position he took the advantage as Tess told him that she was responsible for the plight and misery of her family and now with her job she would earn money and secure a better

livelihood for her family and buy a new horse. Alec kissed her, though she was reluctant and does not willing but owing to the reason that Alec was her employer she was compelled to let him kiss her And D'Urbervilles gave her the kiss of mastery" (Hardy 61). Alec's exploitation of poor Tess continued throughout the novel. In phase 6<sup>th</sup> when Alec saw Tess and he put off the transient appearance of a preacher and come to Tess even after coming to know that she was a married lady now. When Alec called her husband a mule, Tess on an impulse struck him a blow and then again out of pride and superiority of his economic conditions and social rank he uttered "I was your master once, I will be your master again" (Hardy 352). When Tess father died and they became homeless, it was again Alec who with his economic superiority supported the homeless family and compelled Tess to surrender in front of him. "I have enough money both for you and your brothers and sister" (Hardy 355), when they were searching for shelter Alec provided shelter and money to them. Again Tess surrendered herself for the economic stability of her family she said to Angel that with his wealth and money "he has won me back" (Hardy 401).

## **FINDINGS**

Critical Analysis of Tess of D'Urbervilles from Marxist's perspective brings forth and justifies Marx's ideas. Human activities and events are driven and framed by economic realities. Analysis divulges that Tess' tragedy was shaped by the debilitating economic conditions. The main event that sows the seed of Tess' doom was the death of the family horse with the horse's death. Durbeyfields lost the sole means of earning. Real motive behind sending Tess to stock D'Urbervilles was not to claim kin but to derive financial help and economic stability. Alec, knowing that Tess is a poor creature exploited her but her real tragedy lies not in her seduction but in her strong sense of responsibility towards her family. She was the only bread earner for them even after her exploitation by Alec she continued her labor to secure a better living for her family.

Throughout her life she was treated as a commodity for deriving economic benefits. Her mother brought her up in a hope that one day she will marry a gentleman and would free her family from the clutches of poverty. Angel also treated her in the same manner as the prime reason for choosing Tess as his wife was that Tess was a laborious, skilled worker and he needed such wife in order to have a thriving farming career.

The present critical study justifies various Marx's ideas like surplus labor, exploitation and excessive length of working day Tess worked tirelessly for the economic stability of her family she endured everything owing to the strong of responsibility that she feels for them.

Her final surrender to Alec was for the security of her homeless poverty stricken family. The present study proved that the entire events that lead Tess towards her doom were driven by economic forces.

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