

Exploring the use of Language in Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Focus on Social Class and Patriarchal Mindset of Victorian England



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ABSTRACT: Tess of the d'Urbervilles written by Thomas Hardy explores the complicated social structure and patriarchal injustice existing during the Victorian era. In this novel, Hardy uses refined and colloquial language for characters belonging to different classes in order to portray social differences and highlight power and position. Tess, being a girl from lower class was a subject of exploitation and received physical and mental abuse from Alec, Angel and overall, the society. Alec often abused her verbally using words reflecting his ownership over Tess while Angel and the society blamed her for her rape. This paper aims to examine the role of language in Tess of the d'Urbervilles that represents the deep-rooted domination based on gender and class. Through Hardy's narrative style and variation in linguistics pattern themes of male dominance and abuse, possession, control, victim blaming, identity, social class. and the patriarchal mindset of the society has been explored. The findings are based on the primary and secondary data collected from the text Tess of the d'Urbervilles and other journals, articles, research paper of various scholars respectively. Besides, it also focuses on the sympathetic narrative tone of the writer where he expressed his compassion and presented Tess as a tragic character to the readers, who had gone through all sorts of sufferings due to her gender and class. The paper also presents a connection between Tess and the women of all ages who have similar experience and how language has always been an instrument of oppression and control over women by men. Hardy's use of language is a reflection of the social and gender oppression during the Victorian era and how words can be a way of humiliating women.

KEYWORDS: Language, Social Class, Injustice, Possession, Victim Blaming, Identity, Patriarchal mindset

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) is a novel on portrayal of woman character's personality, identity, liberation and justice (Shakury, 2016). In the novel Hardy portrays the miserable life and tragic end of Tess Durbeyfield, a young woman who was shown as a victim of physical assault, did not receive justice due to oppressive structures and norms of Victorian society. Hardy's use of language reflects the verbal abuse women experience based on her sexuality and the society. The novel is not limited only to examining how woman is represented but it also includes the wide variety of language and sexism in language (Ali, Sayeed and Billa, 2011). Hardy's deliberate use of dialogue, dialect, and narrative structure, presents language as a tool for subjugation. The choice of words indicates the authority given to the males of upper class and even the society to abuse a rural girl. It not only highlights the distinction between classes but also to unveil patriarchal control on women through the character of Tess. Central to Hardy's description is the use of language as an instrument for supporting both class differences and male power control but though a sympathetic tone in presenting a girl who has been wronged by the society. In this text Hardy presents the Victorian society, where language reflects both social hierarchy and male centric ideology dominated during that time.

The novel shows linguistic differences through the language of Tess, and Alec and Angel to mark class and social status pointing the stratification prevailing in the society. In Victorian England language is often related to status and superiority, where higher class is associated with power, education, and elevated language and rural dialect is associated lower class and inferiority. The use of vernacular dialect distinguishes Tess from the polished characters having sophisticated language like Alec d'Urbervilles and Angel Clare. The differences in linguistic choice also symbolize the barriers between these two classes and highlights the miseries of Tess in her attempt to come in contact with these upper-class people.

Besides the portrayal of distinction of class, Hardy uses language to explore the patriarchal values that gave male freedom to abuse women verbally and treat them as their subordinate. According to Salma Begum (2022), Tess is subjected to unbearable pressure from male-dominance, symbolized in Angel along with Alec, in a male-centered society in which everyone is dictated by the desire of the man (Begum, 2022). Hardy here, uses objectifying language by Alec to show the control of men over women and the position of women from male viewpoint. On the other hand, the dialogue of Angel presents another side of the patriarchal Victorian society

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where women have certain criteria and standards to maintain as a 'pure and ideal women' based on their chastity. The societal expectations and judgement are also presented in this novel and to what extent a woman is tortured by the society through different tags and labels. Further the voicelessness of a women shows are inability to fight against the men in this patriarchal society portrays the position of a women during Hardy's time who did not have receive justice against the injustice towards them

Research Objectives:

This paper aims to examine the class differences and patriarchal ideologies presented through Hardy's use of language in Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Besides, this study also reflects on the following specific objectives:

1. To evaluate the different linguistic variety used by the characters to distinguish the social class and their position in the society
2. To evaluate Thomas Hardy's narrative voice in presenting Tess's identity and shaping the reader's perspective

Research Questions:

This paper aims at finding the answers of the following questions

1. How does Hardy's choice of language reflect the social context of Victorian England dealing with class and gender issue.
2. How does Hardy's language and narrative style present Tess as a tragic character and forms reader's perception about Tess.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) written by Hardy explore the concept of exploitation based on class and gender. Here, language plays a tool highlight patriarchal norms and social class distinction. This literatures review evaluates on Hardy's use of language by different characters both male and female belonging to different class and how women were subject to exploitation in the Victorian era portrayed in the novel.

Scholarly person like John Paul Riquelme (2000) and Raymond Williams (1973) points that Tess's use of rural dialect is rooted to her low origin and it is her barrier to shift her position in the society. They termed her speech as "natural" and "unrefined". According to Riquelme (2000) Tess's rural speech was deliberately written by Hardy to highlight the exploitation of a women of low class by rich man highlighting the power dynamics of Victorian era. Besides, William proposes that Tess's rural dialect acting as a barrier for her social upgradation reveals Hardy's intention to criticizes the Victorian norms on social mobility that ties people to their classes (William, 1973).

On the contrary, Patricia Ingham (2003) and Peter Widdowson (1993) states language as a tool to assert power control by both Alec and Angel on Tess based on class and gender domination. Alec's speech is flirtatious indicating his right over Tess while Angel's intellectual speech put him in a higher position than Tess. Ingham shoed how these men have the upper-class privilege over the lower-class Tess that is reflected through their dialogue delivery. Similar findings is presented by penny Boumelha (1982) and Elaine Showalter (1990). They argue that the male characters dialogues are manipulative. Boumelha states that Tess's response to Alec is often defensive that indicates her lack of autonomy. Furthermore, Showalter (1990) points that Angel's language highlights Victorian mindset on women's' purity.

Rosemarie Morgan (1988) and Michael Millgate (1971) state that Hardy's narrative pattern criticizes the hypocrisy of his time. Morgan states that Hardy uses the concept of pure women as irony to expose the harshness of the patriarchal society on women who does not ensure justice to women. Critics like Richard Nemesvari (2011) comments on Hardy use of sympathetic tone for Tess in order to present the injustice Tess faced and present her as a victim to the readers. According to Ali Madhloom Hossein, Hardy balances the concept of fallen women by arousing a sense for pity for an outcast woman. According to Senf (1988) women of Hardy's novel do not have a voice and are mostly silent against the injustice against them (Senf. 1988). Tess is one female character of Tess who was silence against the male dominance she faced in her life.

DISCUSSION

In the novel, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, the influence of the patriarchal ideology can be traced through Hardy's linguistic choice and the dialogues of his characters. Tess is represented, from the beginning till the end, as 'less intelligent' and subordinate of men in her life. From being raped to murdering Alec, it is Tess who had been wronged by the people around her, family, lover and society. It is seen that the language used for Tess's misfortune is sometimes sympathetic, sometimes claiming her to be an object or a possession of the male characters. Moreover, the language used by Alec a portrays her as his subordinate and someone who is in his control while Angel uses words to demean her status as a wife because of her loss of virginity. The language of Tess differing from Alec and Angel also separates her from their class.

Dialect and Regional Speech

Language plays a significant role in exploring class differences in Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles, where dialogue and use of diction depicts the social hierarchy and class differences. Characters from different social uses different dialects and accent, which Hardy consciously uses to portray their social position and different lifestyle. Tess, being a village girl, she and her family uses a rural dialect in contrast to the language of the d'Urbervilles and Angel Clare, all of them belonging to a higher social class. Tess's father orders Fred, a village boy to give a message at home saying, "Tell 'em at hwoome that I should like for supper, — well, lamb's fry if they can get it; and if they can't, black-pot; and if they can't get that, well, chitterlings will do." (Hardy,1891,

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p.10). Similar type of language is used by Tess and her mother that is more suitable for the lower class. When Tess returns home, she states

“I'll rock the cradle for 'ee, mother,' said the daughter gently. 'Or I'll take off my best frock and help you wring up?'” (Hardy, 1891, p. 27)

and her mother replies saying,

“I want to go and fetch your father; but what's more'n that, I want to tell 'ee what have happened. Y'll be fess enough, my poppet, when th'st know!” (Hardy, 1891, p. 27)

Tess and her family often use a rustic dialect that is more connected to their peasant identity. Their dialect is unsophisticated and unpolished revealing the language of the village people. Besides, using a dialect form of speech for the lower people, the language also lacked formality compared to the language of Alec and Angel. In their first meeting, Alec inquired the purpose of Tess's visit and introduced himself in a formal way saying, “Well, my Beauty, what can I do for you?.....Never mind me. I am Mr. d'Urberville. Have you come to see me or my mother?” (Hardy, 1891, p. 27). The use of language by Hardy suddenly shifts from a rural dialect to a sophisticated formal tone. Even Tess replied in Standard English saying, “I came to see your mother, sir.” Hardy purposely made Tess use two different forms of English to show her class consciousness and her awareness to deal people with higher status. Hardy comments,

“Mrs. Durbeyfield habitually spoke the dialect; her daughter, who had passed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London-trained mistress, spoke two languages; the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English” (Hardy, 1891, p. 27)

That reveals that Tess uses dialect at home while a standard form is used to interact with people. However, the language used by Alec also reveals his class consciousness that puts him in a position to insult and objectify Tess. Even it puts in him an authoritative position to show Tess her social position.

For example, Alec proudly states, “I was born bad, and I have lived bad....” highlighting his audacity to flaunt his bad attitude and declares his behavior as something unchangeable.

Language and Patriarchy:

Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) written by Hardy depicts a Victorian society where women are often subjugated by men and judged on rigid moral standards. Through their verbal abuse Male characters reflect their patriarchal mindset and control over women. Hardy's use of words in order to portray a character or the dialogue delivery of each character, excellently echoes their role in the Victorian society. Hardy is successful in choosing words that presents Alec's lustful nature, Tess's submissive nature and Angel's weak mentality. Alec's use of language objectifies Tess while Angel's language presents an ideal picture of women from patriarchal society's viewpoint.

Hardy's use of language in portraying Tess through societal lens reveals the judgements and expectations she receives from the society and men around her. Tess is often described in terms that reduce her to an object of male desire. For example, Alec d'Urberville, the man who rapes Tess, often uses words like “my pretty” and “my beauty,” that asserts his control and possession over her. Alec abused Tess verbally from their beginning he directly approached her for kissing her lips saying, “Let me put one little kiss on those holmberry lips, Tess, or even on that warmed cheek, and I'll stop — on my honour, I will!” (Hardy, 1891, p. 61). This word of Alec directly shows how the man of the Victorian era had no respect for women. When Tess was reluctant to his request, he keeps persuading her as if her wish does not matter at all. This objectification of Tess is reflecting patriarchal mindset where women are seen equivalent to materialistic properties. Alec later says:

“Remember, my lady, I was your master once! I will be your master again. If you are any man's wife you are mine!” (Hardy, 1891, p. 370)

Alec's dialogue here reflects his declaration of ownership over Tess and to reinforce his power and control over her, treating Tess as his property rather than an individual person. This is how Tess's personality and life has always seemed to be a property for Alec. Even when her father died, he continuously persuaded her to stay with him and didn't value to receive negative reply from her. Here, language, which is used to categorize women below men, is a tool that is used by patriarchal society through all ages to present women according to their will. On the other hand, Angel's does not view Tess as his property but as ‘another’ person knowing about her loss of virginity. His idealization of Tess is shattered after the revelation of her rape, which wasn't her fault. He quotes: “You were one person; now you are another. My God—how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque—premeditation as that!” (Hardy, 1891, p. 248)

His use of the word ‘grotesque’ to defines how ridiculous and impossible it seems for him to be with her compromising with her past. Angel Clare's words seem more shaped by patriarchal ideologies, where the rape victim, being a woman is judged and punished by the society. This highlights how language reinforces the idea that a woman's value is contingent upon her sexual purity. Furthermore, the patriarchal view influencing the characterization of the important male figure Alec and Angel is pointed through their use of words. He further said, “I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you.” (Hardy, 1891, p. 248) referring to the mindset of a Victorian man, no matter how much educated, values women based on their purity relating to virginity.

Victim Blaming:

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It is often seen that women are blamed for the reason of being 'raped' by men. In literature too, the language used to portray a female character is often shaped by patriarchal mentality. That is why, Tess suffered the torture of being blamed for Alec's sin. Even her own mother Joan Durbeyfield was not sympathetic towards her daughter's sufferings and was only worried about Alec not marrying Tess. When Tess returned to her mother, she was only concerned about the marriage between Tess and Alec. Joan said, 'Any woman would have done it but you, after that!It would have been something like a story to come back with, if you had!' (Hardy, 1891, p. 93) For Joan marrying Tess was the only and a beautiful solution of what happened to Tess. She further said,

"After all the talk about you and him which has reached us here, who would have expected it to end like this! Why didn't ye think of doing some good for your family instead o' thinking only of yourself?" (Hardy, 1891, p. 94)

This statement of Joan indicates their mentality led by societal expectations where their daughter being raped is less matter of concerned than the sorrow of being rejected by the person assaulting her. It is because the marriage would be a increase in status and also regaining Tess's honor. Later Joan, being the mother of Tess accused her for being raped as Alec didn't mean to marry her. She quotes,

'You ought to have been more careful if you didn't mean to get him to make you, his wife!' (Hardy, 1891, p. 94)

From these dialogues of Joan, it is very clear that women are always accused for their assault. It is seen often that society, even today, pass comments like, 'she was wearing too short dress that is why she is raped', 'she was too extrovert', 'she was too casual with the boys. Victim blaming through such use of language is clearly visible in Hardy novel. Not only her mother, the neighbors also "whispered when her back was turned —" and made comments like, "How pretty she is; and how that best frock do set her off! I believe it cost an immense deal; and that it was a gift from him" (Hardy, 1891, p. 97). She became the talk of the village and people taunted her saying 'Ah, she makes herself unhappy.' If she seems miserable and if she tries to forget everything and be happy these people will criticize saying, 'Ah, she bears it very well.' (Hardy, 1891, p. 104). People abuse her verbally when she returned to her hometown and causes her to feel guilty everywhere she goes (Begum, 2022). Even in Church people didn't miss the chance of gossiping about her. Not just the society, Tess herself felt guilty about her rape that is why she confessed to Angel about her past. Tess accepts the reaction of Angel despising her saying, "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; and I shan't finish the good-hussif I cut out and meant to make while we were in lodgings" (Hardy, 1891, p. 249). Through this dialogue of Tess, Hardy not only presents that Tess thought herself to be guilty and somehow blamed herself but also reflects that women of Victorian era did not have a voice to stand against the injustice.

Even in today's society we can find the traces of verbal abuse against women. According to Krishtanti (2022) it is very clearly seen that in social media platforms using aggressive language against women is a normal issue. Jing-Schmidt and Peng (2014) observed the use of a gender-based cyber slur reflecting misogyny in the Chinese lexicon of *biāo*, which is translated into 'slut' (as cited in Krishtanti, 2022). Few days back in India the raped doctor was blamed for her assault. It is a common practice of the patriarchal society to use words like 'slut', 'too friendly', 'modern girl' against the rape victim in today's time too.

In the novel, the female protagonist is represented as "other" according to Simon De Beauvoir's theory. While Tess is shown as an 'Fallen Women' who is othered by the society that honors women in terms of her chastity and punishes her for the crime of a man. A rape victim here, is blamed even by her parents and looked down as an 'other being' who can be easily be blamed for her rape and be abandoned by her husband. Angel could not even stand her present knowing about her rape and said, "I cannot stay — in this room — just now". (Hardy, 1891, p. 249).

Sympathetic Narration:

Hardy presents Tess as a sympathetic and tragic heroine to the readers whose fate is influenced by the patriarchal society. According to Shakury (2016), Hardy represented Tess as a character who has the self-sacrificing tendency and is a weaker character and has to sacrifice herself, in the male dominating society who received injustice from her surroundings (Shakury, 2016). However, she is shown to be 'bad' in the eyes of the Victorian people norms because of her loss of chastity due to Alec. Tess's character being portrayed as a victim of the patriarchal society is shaped by the men around her, such as Alec d'Urberville, who molests her, and Angel Clare, who initially idealizes her but later rejects her after knowing her past. Hardy describes the rape scene as,

"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..." (Hardy, 1891, p. 82)

Hardy used symbolism to relate to Tess virginity as pure as white and loss of chastity as her doom. The author wanted the reader to connect with Tess's suffering and feel sympathetic towards her. Nevertheless, Hardy's portrayal of Tess is quite ambiguous. At some point he tries to show her pure and innocent while other time he unintentional through use of words like, "poor darlings" he shows her weakness who is unable to stand for herself. Besides Hardy use of language to describe Tess's femineity and beauty is from a male perception who views women's body as an object and a subject of 'male gaze'. His description of Tess's beauty is presented in way to show her feminine beauty that indirectly justifies Alec being seduced by her beauty. Shakury (2016) further added that Hardy portrayed the misery of the 'helpless maiden' in such a compelled the readers to sympathize her. Besides, strong sense truthfulness that is evident in Tess's character is another positive feature that persuades the reader to

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admire her. Hardy presents her as 'Pure Woman' in the subtitle of the novel, challenging the societal concept of a raped victim being impure and loss of innocence. Nevertheless, phrases like "poor little Tess" used by characters diminishes her position and she is shown as someone pitied not respected. According to Hussein and Hasan, Tess is considered as a fallen woman from viewpoint that is set by the society but Hardy's argument bring forth the circumstances that led her to be in that position being seduced and finally raped by Alec.

Identity of Tess:

The novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles explores how names and tags imposed on Tess serve to form and control her identity, emphasizing the gender and power dynamics existing within the society. The title of the text itself forms and reshapes Tess's identity. Tess Durbeyfield, full name of Tess, ties her to her family and her social class. Later her lineage to the noble d'Urberville is revealed by her father, and this social name later shaped her destiny. That is why Hardy, named her Tess of the d'Urberville in the title, referring to the suffering she went through in her journey of achieving social status. The name seems a burden for Tess's past and contrasts with the power it holds in the eyes of others. Even in the first encounter between Tess and Alec, it was clear that Alec didn't want to accept her as a d'Urberville. He said, "I must think if I cannot do something. My mother must find a berth for you. But, Tess, no nonsense about "d'Urberville"; — "Durbeyfield" only, you know — quite another name." ((Hardy,1891, p. 48). It is clear that Alec wanted to show her position that is why he emphasized her being a Durbeyfield and not a d'Urberville.

The title of Tess of the d'Urbervilles is debated due to the subtitle of Tess as a 'pure woman'. This sub-title of a pure woman depicts the labeling of woman in the Victorian society and challenges the recognition of fallen woman. Tess and Angel strive with the question of Tess's purity (Ali. Sayeed and Bilal, 2011). Thomas Hardy added a subtitle "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented", rejecting the tag of 'fallen woman' imposed on Tess, being a rape victim. Through this subtitle, Hardy also wanted to present Tess as pure and not tainted in the view of the reader challenging the patriarchal Victorian mindset of his time. His selection of the title where Tess is presented as d'Urberville and her suffering is related to this name, the subtitle presents another angle to the readers in his selection of the words "A Pure Woman". As cited in Hussein (2018), "the lore of the fallen woman has its roots in patriarchy" that is why Hardy added a subtitle to reject his concept of fallen women connected to her virginity and gave Tess a tag of a pure woman.

CONCLUSION

The paper titled "Exploring the Use of Language in Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Focus on Social Class and Patriarchal Mindset of Victorian England" shows Hardy's narrative style to present the class and gender issue existing in his society. In the novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Hardy showed how language can be tool of suppression and control based on class and gender. Through crafted speech and dialogue delivery, colloquial dialect and narrative style Hardy not only highlighted the injustice Tess received from the society due to her gender and class but also showed how women are easily a subject of male gaze and verbal abuse. Tess's interaction with males from higher class and receiving injustice is deeply rooted to her gender and class. Her difference with these people is marked through her speech and dialect. The paper observed that language was not just a narrative device but a means to bring forth the domination and injustice based on class and patriarchal mindset existing in the Victorian England. However, the paper did not relate the findings to any specific theories. Hardy's use of language in Tess of the d'Urbervilles can also be shown from feminist and Marxist theories. The paper can be related to the verbal abuse women experience from the male in the society where objectifying language and victim blaming is a common phenomenon against women or rape victim. Through marking the difference in linguistic variety of Tess with Alec and Angel, Hardy also criticized how the justice she received from the society differed from them, who are men and belongs to the higher class. The paper finds the linguistic difference based on class and male dominance in speech of the characters marks the hierarchies existing in the Victorian England and Hardy's deliberate choice of words represented it beautifully.

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