UNIT 14: THOMAS HARDY: *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE:

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14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of Thomas Hardy the novelist
- make connections between the novel and the Victorian World
- discuss *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* as a Victorian novel
- discuss the importance of the world of Wessex in the novels of Hardy
- trace the storyline of the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

14.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will read about the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* written by the famous novelist and poet Thomas Hardy who wrote at the end of 19th century. The Victorian Era, when Hardy lived, was a time of great change. His novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is about a young country girl, Tess, whose father discovers that their family descended from one of the oldest, most aristocratic families in England. However, the discovery has tragic consequences on Tess. She is sent off to the wealthy branch of

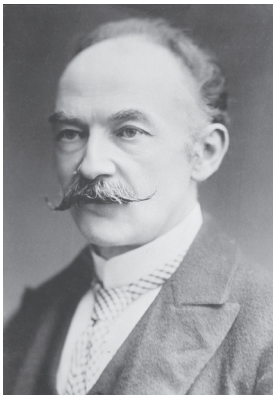
the family to "claim kin" (i.e., to borrow money), and ends up being raped by the son of that branch of the family. You should note how the social elites were endowed with the notion of 'new money' and how many of the old aristocratic families were gone into oblivion. Tess' family in the novel had gone through the same predicament as the whole Durbeyfield family loses itself in fantasising their belonging to the aristocratic family d'Urbervilles, which finally led them to the tragedy. The hardship and drudgery of the life style of the rural folk are explored most beautifully in the novel. Hardy has a dig at the religious orthodoxy as well as social values of the times. By the time, you finish reading this novel, you will learn about Hardy's philosophy of life and his concern about the changes that were taking place in his times, finding an important place in his great fictional works.

14.3 THOMAS HARDY: THE NOVELIST

This section will introduce you to some of the main facets of the life and works of Hardy as well as the main features of his novels.

14.3.1 His Life

Thomas Hardy was born on the 2nd June 1840 in Higher Bockhampton in Dorset, a rural region of southwestern England. His father was a master mason and his mother came from an established family of Dorset. He owed much to his parents for his love of music, love of reading and a strength of self that made him stand like a rock amidst all the changes that were taking place during his lifetime. Hardy first went to a village school and then he went to a school at Dorchester. At the age of sixteen Hardy was apprenticed to John Hicks, an ecclesiastical architect who lived in the city of Dorchester. In 1857, Hardy began to write verses and essays, but he decided not to leave his vocation as an architect. In 1862, he



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went to London to look for work and became an assistant to Arthur Blomfield. He was still not sure which vocation he should go for. In 1865, his first prose work was published in a journal, though he was much more interested in poetry. He had suffered from bouts of depression as he felt utterly lonely and finally he fell sick. In 1867, he returned to Dorset and started working for Hicks again. His architectural training at Dorchester lasted for six years but it had a decisive influence on him as a novelist because his novels show a careful planning and it is not without significance that Tess is divided into a meticulously worked out structure.

In 1870, Hardy took to writing novels by following Meredith's advice and published *Desperate Remedies* in 1871, *Under the Greenwood Tree* in 1872 and *A Pair of Blue eyes* in 1873. In 1874, he produced the masterpiece *Far From the Madding Crowd* which brought him immense fame. He married Emma Lavinia Gifford the same year. After marriage, Hardy and his wife wandered about Europe and finally settled at Sturminster Newton, in a villa amidst calm and serene natural surroundings. In 1878, *The Return of the Natives* was published and after this Hardy decided to go back to London. In between 1878 and 1912, Hardy had contributed immensely in the genres of novels, poetry, and short stories. He was gradually getting recognition and became famous for his works. The Order of Merit was conferred upon him in 1910.

Hardy's marriage life with Emma was not a peaceful one. Neither of them sustained in matrimony the joys and affinities they had dreamed of in their courtship days. They did not have any kids. However, she encouraged him to pursue his literary career and shared a caring for their pets; yet their temperamental differences, domestic disagreements and Emma's feeling of being neglected by her husband made their relation bitter. His wife was never happy with him as she thought that she had married much below her parental status. She insulted Hardy publicly; yet Hardy never complained about it. In 1912, Mrs. Hardy passed away unexpectedly. After the death of his wife, Hardy made a trip to Cornwell to revive his memories of his courtship with his dead wife and his poems

1912-1913 portrays his feelings at her death. In 1914, Hardy married Florence Dugdale who was much younger to him. His domestic life with his second wife became peaceful. However, this new found peace was destroyed by the First World War as he visited the English and German soldiers lying in the hospitals in Dorchester. He was utterly disturbed at the sight of the destruction. However, he went on writing poems and enjoyed the poetry reading sessions of his wife. His death came in 1928, which had created a vacuum in the literary circle of England. He has been regarded as the last great Victorian for his immense contribution to the literary field.

Hardy showed a wide range in his novels. He delineated a perfect picture of the Victorian conflict between the rural surroundings and life and the newly emerging mechanical and materialistic urban life style. Most of his novels portray the village life and the complexities and intrigues that were seen in the rural societies of his times. Hardy felt that the conduct of the upper classes was screened by the conventions, and thus the real character was not easily seen. However, in case of the lower classes, conduct was a direct expression of the inner life and thus characters could be directly portrayed through the act. Thus, Hardy was more at ease in delineating the lower strata of life, the rural folks and the growing shift of the rural folk to the urban set up which had resulted in utter despair. Hardy believed that the novel should have a total effect like living organism, in which all the component parts like plot, character, dialogue, and scenery are set in such a way that it gives the impression of a harmonious whole. He was immensely successful in elevating fiction writing to a conscious art.



LET US KNOW

Wessex: *Wessex* was the name given by Hardy for a territory in the South-west of England. Hardy set most of his major novels in *Wessex, which* he named after the medieval Anglo- Saxon kingdom that existed in that part of the country prior to Norman Conquest. Hardy used "Wessex" in *Far From the Madding Crowd* for the first time and

in its preface, he described *Wessex* as "a merely realistic dream country". Gradually Hardy began to divide Wessex into different regions. In *The Return of the Native* (1878), he introduced South Wessex; in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) Upper- and Mid-Wessex and in *Jude the Obscure* (1895) he tells us about North, Nether and Outer Wessex. In the words of Lea Hermann—"We have it on his own assurance that the Wessex of the novels and poems is practically identical with the Wessex of history, and includes the counties of Berkshire, Wilts[hire], Somerset, Hampshire, Dorset, and Devon-either wholly or in part." (*Thomas Hardy's Wessex*, 1913: xvii) Wessex plays a crucial role in Hardy's works as it provided him with a space to present the significant issues like progress, religion, nature, sexuality, primitivism and so on in his works.

Hardy's philosophy of life was influenced by his age to a significant extent. The scientific and intellectual thought of the times had a great impact on the literature of the era. Naturalism, which advocated a frank and full portrayal of life, was in the air. It stressed the treatment of man as an ordinary component in the indomitable forces of Nature. Hardy too came under the influence of Naturalism and in his novels, we get in varying degrees the themes like the immutability of Nature and the transience of human being, the grandeur of Nature and the littleness of man, the justice of Nature and man's relentless struggle to evade Natural justice, which are so common in Hardy's works. His philosophy of life presupposes that there is an inherent cruelty in the pattern of the Universe and that human beings try to defy that until they are taken over by hostile destiny. Chance in its malevolent aspect is an important facet of his themes. A struggle between man and an omnipotent Fate interprets Hardy's notion of human situation. Fate manifests itself in different guises. Sometimes it appears as a Natural force, sometimes as an innate weakness of character. Chance exerts a conspicuous influence

in the course of events. Love is another incarnation of Fate in Hardy's novels. Destiny as an inscrutable force beyond human's comprehension is as constant a part of hardy's vision as that of the Greeks. It is beyond man's power to rule his destiny—a fact so poignantly portrayed in Hardy's fictions that many critics call him a 'Fatalist'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What ideas of the lower class people can be derived from Hardy's novels?

Q 2: How does the term Wessex appear in Hardy's novels?

Q 3: Briefly state Hardy's philosophy of life.

14.3.2 His Works

In the section entitled "Early Life and Architecture" of the book *Life of Thomas Hardy* by Thomas and Florence Hardy, Hardy describes the three strands of his life— the professional life, the scholar's life, and the rustic life. In the scholar's life, he went through an intense programme of study to equip himself for a career in writing. Having failed to get any of his poetry published hardy began to write novels and *Desperate Remedies* his first novel was published in 1871. The novel failed but the next one *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) achieved some success and the success of *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) heralded the arrival of a novelist of promise and he became a full time writer.

Hardy's literary career could be divided into three distinctive phases. The **first phase** was started with *Desperate Remedies* (1871), followed by the publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) and ended with *Jude the Obscure* (1895). He attained gradual recognition as a novelist who was concerned with themes like inscrutable fate, man in conflict with the world etc. Some of his famous

novels are *Under the Greenwood Trees* (1872), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *The Well Beloved* (1892). Let me tell you that Hardy had earned fame for his short stories also. We can even include the volumes of Short stories in this phase. His Short Story collection *Wessex Tales* (1888), *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891) and *Life's Little Ironies* (1894) brought him recognition as one of the greatest short story writers of English literature.

The **second phase** is the phase when his epic poem *The Dynasts (1903-1908)* was published. Before that, in 1898, he published the first of the eight books of verse but until the publication of *The Dynasts*, his poetry was not taken seriously. However, critics opine that this poem is the single greatest achievement of his career. This poem represents in dramatic form the course of the Napoleonic Wars that took place from 1805 to 1815.

The **third phase** begins with the publication of his poetry collection *Time's Laughing Stocks* in 1909. This was followed by the publication of a few of other poetry collections, namely, *Satires of Circumstances* (1914), *Moments of Vision* (1917), and *Human Shows, Far Phantasies* (1925).

Hardy had ranked his works in different orders. Critics observe that he used to arrange his works according to the responses of the public. For the Wessex edition, Hardy classified his works into three groups:

Novels of Character or Environment: *Under the Greenwood Tree, Far from the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Woodlanders, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure, Wessex Tales* and *Life's Little Ironies.*

Romances and Fantasies: *A Pair of Blue Eyes, The Trumpet Major, Two on a Tower, The Well-Beloved* and *A Group of Noble Dames.*

Novels of Ingenuity and Experiment: *Desperate Remedies, The Hand of Ethelberta* and *A Laodicean.*

You should note that tragedy in Hardy's novels arises out of the influence of the modern competitive lifestyle over the simple old, rural life. The plots of the novels *Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Woodlanders, Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* are based on this conflict between old and the new world, between characters belonging to the countryside, and the characters coming to the countryside from the urban places. His novels portray the loss of rustic simplicity and innocence at the onslaught of the urban, capitalist world views. Another interesting fact is that Hardy was highly influenced by Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) which had a great impact on his thought.

As a novelist Hardy enjoyed his most popular period in the late Victorian era. His popularity rests more with his novels than his poetry. In his novels, he dealt with many complex issues like clash of principles and motives, right and wrong, courage and cowardice, duty and desire, free will and Chance or Fate. Virginia Woolf opines that Hardy's vision of the world is a vision of man's lot as they revealed themselves to a powerful imagination, a profound and poetic genius, a gentle and humane soul. However, the helpless condition of human beings in the hands of destiny leads to a state of pessimism that is present in Hardy's works. His pessimistic outlook of life was the result of his ill health, morbid temperament and the life experiences. He experienced and witnessed a bitter struggle for existence, thwarted desire, undeserved pain and suffering, disappointments and disillusionments, higher aspirations ending in utter failures and so on. All these made him highly pessimistic towards life and this pessimism was present in his works. He saw despair, dejection, failure, frustration and tragedy in the life of the rural folks of Wessex who were poor and dependent. He witnessed them undergoing all sorts of oppression and social exploitation and also the suffering due to the Immanent Will. All these made him view life with pessimism, which he presented in his novels.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Reflect on Hardy's portrayal of characters in his novels.

Q 5: Discuss briefly some of the core issues of Hardy's novels.

Q 6: What are the three strands in Hardy's life?

Q 7: Enlist the three phases in Hardy's writerly life.

Q 8: Briefly explain the three types of Hardy's works that express his interest in the Wessex?

14.4 THE STORY OF THE NOVEL *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES*

This section will help you to have some ideas regarding the story of the novel. However, it is insisted that you collect a standard text of the novel and start reading it to gain a better grasp of the issues raised in the text. *Tess of d'Urbervilles* is regarded as the greatest of Hardy's Wessex novels. Let me tell you that the novel *Tess of d'Urbervilles* has seven phases; each phase presents a shift or new development in the plot. Critics have praised Hardy for the opening chapter which gives a comprehensive account of d'Urberville's descent, the racy humour of the dialogue, the picture of John Durbeyfield etc.

The novel *Tess of d'Urbervilles* has seven phases and each phase presents one significant development in the storyline. **The first phase** is "The Maiden" where the novelist introduces us to Tess and her family. The opening chapter presents John Durbeyfield, who, on his way home to Marlott comes across an old Parson who addresses him as "Sir John". Then Mr. Durbeyfield comes to know from parson Tringham that Durbeyfield descends from a noble family, the d'Urbervilles. Knowing about this family history Durbeyfield feels self important and sends for a horse and a carriage on hire to carry him home. Then we are introduced to Tess and Angel. Tess takes part in a dancing procession in their village Marlott and their dancing is disturbed by the comic appearance of Mr. Durbeyfield. Angel Clare passes through the village and sees Tess amidst the dancing maidens. Both the

individuals have their wistful sight at one another. Then Hardy introduces us to the depressing picture of the sordid Durbeyfield household. The final blow comes with the death of Prince, the horse and this practically necessitated Tess to go for earning money. Tess is persuaded to apply for a work at their rich relation Mrs. d'Urbervilles, who lives with her son Alec in a big house the Slopes. Tess's mother puts in her mind the idea of marriage with Alec which Tess accepts with some kind of resentment. Tess starts working at the Slopes and looks after Mrs. d'Urbervilles' poultry and Alec follows her every now and then. One fine day, Tess joins a Saturday night excursion to Chaseborough and witnesses a vulgar fight in the course of which a girl called Car Darch attacks Tess. Alec rescues Tess and carries her off on horseback to the woods. Tess was exhausted and falls asleep. Alec takes the opportunity and seduces her. Hardy makes it clear that Tess is a little dazed at the seduction of Alec as she partially has a belief that Alec loves her. With this tragic act, the first Phase of the novel ends.

The second phase "Maiden No More" narrates Tess' condition post her seduction by Alec. She comes back home and narrates her condition to her mother. She is only seventeen and tells her mother that when she left her house she was only a child and that she didn't know about all these. However, Tess goes into depression as she feels that she cannot be a part of the normal gathering, even going to the church. She starts going to the woods and feels some kind of solace thereby being in solidarity with Nature. However, she is always disturbed by her guilty conscience. Tess delivers a baby and starts working in the field, as she wants to work and earn. Her baby boy falls sick and Tess realises that the boy has to be christened. She decides to christen him herself and gives the name Sorrow. When the next morning her baby dies, she talks to the parson and asks him if she can bury him in the churchyard. The Parson is moved and asks her to bury the child herself, as they cannot do so. That night Tess buries the child and makes a little cross for his grave. The whole winter she stays at her father's house and finally decides to take a job of milkmaid in a dairy farm many miles to the Southward.

The third Phase "The Rally" marks the new beginning of Tess's life at the Talbothays. When she reaches the dairy farm, she is warmly received

by the master of the dairy farm. Tess starts a new life full of zest. She makes friend with other milkmaids. There she meets Angel Clare who is an apprentice at the Dairy. Angel has resolved to open a farm of his own. Initially Angel could not recognise Tess, but gradually they develop some kind of affinity for one another. Though they share some kind of passionate feeling for each other, they try hard to keep themselves out of it. Tess comes to know that three of her milkmaid friends too love Angel and she tries to give a hint to Angel to choose one of them. All the episodes finally lead to Angel's declaration of love for Tess. Tess accepts his love without much reflection. Tess is blissfully happy when Angel embraces her.

In the fourth phase, "The Consequence", the love of Angel for Tess gets more intense and Tess persists with her reluctance to give any commitment. Angel's admirable intellectual qualities are highlighted here and we come to know about his family. She is disturbed by pangs of conscience and feels that she should tell Angel about her past. Many a time she tries but of no result. In the meantime, Angel keeps on telling her to marry him to which she finally gives in. Finally, the date has been fixed. However, Tess is still in a dilemma and writes a confessional note and slips it under his door, but it slides under the carpet and Angel never sees it. After the wedding, Angel confesses about a past relation with a woman and seeks Tess's forgiveness. Tess readily forgives him and confesses about her past relation with Alec.

The fifth phase "The Woman Pays", we find Tess falling in adverse situation again. Angel cannot accept Tess after learning about her past. He tells Tess that she is not the woman he loved. Therefore, they pass their wedding night in different rooms. Next morning Tess talks about divorce, but Angel tells her that divorce was not legally possible. Tess tells him of her thoughts of drowning herself, but Angel tells her that the thought of suicide is unworthy of her. So finally, they decided upon a separation. The last night which Angel and Tess lived together in the house at Wellbridge, Tess finds Angel sleepwalking when he lifts her and takes her to the graveyard adjoining to the nearby church. All along, he keeps murmuring "My poor, poor Tess– my dearest, darling Tess" and finally he puts her on the ground as if she is a dead body. However, in the morning he does not

even remember anything. Finally, they part their company and Angel gives money to Tess so that she does not face any financial hardship. Tess returns home and tells her parents about her broken marriage. Her mother scolds her for not following her advice. Her father asks her mother if this time she was married to Angel or like last time she was used by him and then discarded. Tess is heartbroken thinking that if her father does not believe her, how will other people do so. Angel decides to go to Brazil to seek some new job. Angel too goes back home but decides not to tell anything about Tess to his family. When he plans to go to Brazil, he meets Izz and asks her if she would like to go with him to Brazil. She accepts his proposal, but during their conversation, she tells him that no one can love him like Tess. This makes Angel drop the idea of taking Izz with him to Brazil. Eight months later, Tess starts feeling the financial crisis more acutely and decides to go in search of a job. Finally, she arrives at Flinscomb-Ash and gets employed as a Farm hand. Marian helps her in getting this job. Tess's new master is a hard task master and Tess has to really slog hard the whole day. Izz joins the farm as a worker and Tess comes to know about Angels' proposal to Izz. She is happy that Angel did not take her to Brazil, but feels sad also as Angel asked her to accompany him to Brazil. Tess waits for Angel's letter and is very sad as Angel has not written to her. So thinking of getting some information from Angel's parents, she decides to visit them. She visits the vicarage where Angel's father is the in charge. However, she reaches late and so fails to meet him. On her way, she finds two men who are Angel's brothers and Mercy Chant, the girl whom Angel's parents had chosen to be his wife, who speak ill of her. Therefore, she decides not to go to their house, returns to Flinscomb-Ash, and is surprised to see Alec d'Urberville, who is preaching sermon to a gathering in an earnest voice.

The sixth phase "The Convict", presents Alec D'Urbervilles once again. This time he is a preacher who keeps on persuading Tess to marry him and then to go with him with his missionary work. She comes to know that Angel's father has converted Alec without understanding his evil nature. Alec comes to her and proposes to her every now and then to marry her. Realising the danger in which she finds herself, Tess writes a letter to Angel to help her. On the other hand, Angel has a realisation that the conventional

moral beliefs made him accept Tess in that way and he decides to come back to Tess. One day Tess gets the news that her parents are very sick and she needs to go home. At this point also, Alec offers him money to help her out of her difficulties. However, Tess does not respond. Her father dies which makes them leave their cottage they have been occupying under a lease. The whole family is in utter difficulties. Alec keeps on extending his help to them and Tess keeps on refusing it. Finally, the Durbeyfield family shifts to Kingsbere and there too they don't find any accommodation. Even here, Alec offers to help them, which is thwarted by Tess. Seeing Tess and her family in trouble, Izz and Marian writes to Angel about Tess's difficulties.

The seventh phase "Fulfilment" presents Angels' return from Brazil and he gets the two letters of Tess and the one written by Marian and Izz. He broods over the matter and finally decides to accept Tess as his wife and goes out in search of her. Finally, when he meets her, it is too late because by then Tess has given in to Alec's persistent offer to help her brothers and sisters. Alec persuades her to believe that Angel would never come back to her. Tess goes back to her room and fights with Alec. Her landlady finds Tess go out after sometime and then discovers that Alec has been stabbed. On the other hand, Tess runs and meets Angel on the way. This time Angel accepts her in spite of hearing what she has done. He embraces Tess and tells her that he loves her. Tess is happy and satisfied. They begin to roam around the countryside and feel blissfully happy. They spend five days at Bramshurst Court. However, angel insists that they should move ahead or else they will be caught. Finally, they arrive at Stonehenge and spend a night there where Tess asks Angel to marry her sister Liza-Lu in case something happens to her. However, Angel is not ready to do that. The next morning they find themselves surrounded by policemen. Tess is arrested. On a July morning, Angel and Liza-Lu go to the city of Wintoncester because this is the day of Tess's execution. At eight o clock, Tess is executed. Both Angel and Liza-Lu bent down as if in prayer and remain there for a long time. Then they get up, join hands, and walk out.

Therefore, you find that in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* the natural world is portrayed both as a representative habitat and a literary metaphor. Let

me tell you each phase has an excerpt about nature; the setting of each phase is always full of nature which symbolises the fact that nature is directly related to the emotions of Tess. In each location, from Talbothays to Flintscomb-Ash Tess's life is greatly influenced by the natural world. The external world and her inner consciousness reflect one another. Hardy believed that the constant shift of human feelings between pain and pleasure is also reflected in seasonal nature of life. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, let me tell you that Tess's life begins and ends in the spring, she falls in love during the summer months, and she marries in the dead of winter. Thus, all the phases of the novel cover the seasonal cycles of a year by including all of nature and its corresponding changes.



LET US KNOW

During Queen Victoria's reign from1837 to 1901, England became the most powerful and rich country in the world through its colonial expansion and the industrial revolution. The population in England doubled during Victoria's reign, and there could be seen a change in the country's economy because of the eruptions of industries. Along with the constant flow of people from the rural areas to the urban centres, there also emerged a transition from the conventional Victorian values to a less rigid modern worldview. Hardy stands at this transitional period and reflects on the conflicts between rigid Victorian tradition and modern innovation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What are the incidents that led Tess to leave her house to work at the d'Urbervilles?

Q 10: Narrate in your own words Tess's experiences at the Talbothays farm.

Q 11: In what ways, is phase five "The Woman Pays" of the novel, significant?

14.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF HARDY

Thomas Hardy was a prolific writer with immense contribution to have enriched the literary world of late Victorian England. He started his literary career as a novelist though his early experiments in this genre were failures. George Meredith, his astute critic had severely criticised his early novels like, *Desperate Remedies* and *The Poor Man and Lady.* However, it was Meredith himself who had guided him to come up with better creation in the novelistic genre. He has been regarded as the last great Victorian, though his poetry and short stories cover a few years of the twentieth century. Hardy crafted artistically a link between the 19th and 20th century. Being born at time of transition, Hardy had witnessed the effects of the traditional values on the one hand and the emerging trends of a Capitalist society on the other. This conflict was evident in his writings. This remains one of the most significant traits of his career as a novelist.

When the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was published in three volumes in 1891, its improper 'exploitness' was criticised by many readers. "The Quarterly Review" called it a clumsy, sordid tale of boorish brutality and lust. "The Saturday Review" called it an 'unpleasant story' written in an 'unpleasant way.' A reviewer in "The Nation" dismissed Tess as 'a sensuous woman' as against Hardy himself calling her 'a pure woman.' However, favourable critical comments soon began to appear and the novel came to be taken as a classic of English fiction. Whatever unfavourable criticism was there, it was mostly about Hardy's pessimism and style rather than his views on Church and sexual morals. Clementina Black in 1892 wrote that in many respects Tess was Hardy's finest work and its superiority was largely due to a profound moral earnestness. Another critic Margaret Oliphant wrote in the same year that Tess is the history, as Hardy tells, par excellence, of a pure woman. However, you will find it interesting to see the diverse ways in which Hardy's novel has been received in the modern era. Irving Howe in 1967 praises Tess's character in very glowing way. He opines that Tess is one of the greater examples that we have in English Literature of how a writer can take hold of a cultural stereotype and, through the sheer

intensity of his affection, pare and purify it into something that is morally ennobling. Lionel Johnson observes a general trait in Hardy's novels that "they present either the resolution of a discord into a harmony or the breaking of a harmony by a discord" and mentions Tess as an example. D. H. Lawrence focuses on the tragedy of Tess as a result of a division between the bounds of the community and her natural, individual desire.

The novel has caught the attention of the feminist critics too. Rosemarie Morgan in her book *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* talks about the treatment of the protagonist Tess in the novel from a feminist perspective. She praises Hardy for retaining for Tess, with her emotional generosity, sexual vitality and moral strength, the capacity to rise above her fall and, ultimately to redeem the man who, bearing the values and sexual prejudices and double-standards of the society, fails to rise above them in the hour of need. Tess is not bereft of will, self-determination and courage at the last hours of her life. Thus, Morgan is highly appreciative about Hardy's treatment of Tess. However, another feminist critic Ellen Rooney argues that Tess was disempowered by Hardy's self-bowdlerising. Rooney argues that the very terms 'rape' and 'seduction', as the binaries for phallocentric discourse, collapse into one another, each supposing the female subject as victim barred from desire. She opines, "Hardy is unable to represent the meaning of the encounter in the Chase from Tess's point of view because to present Tess as a speaking subject is to risk the possibility that she may appear as the subject of desire. Yet a figure with no potential as a desiring subject can only formally be said to refuse desire, to testify to the absence of desire; the possibility of action lie elsewhere. Hardy is blocked in both directions. To preserve Tess's purity, he must insist on her passivity, situating her firmly in the problematic of consent: a 'subject' who does not speak her silence guarantees our sympathy." (Gribble,13) Thus, you can see that the novel has gained different perspectives as the time has passed by; but nobody can deny its important position in the history of English Literature as a masterpiece of Hardy.



14.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you have learnt that Thomas Hardy is one of the most significant writers of The Victorian Era which had been the time of great changes. During Queen Victoria's reign from1837 to 1901, England became the most powerful and rich country in the world through its colonial expansion and the industrial revolution. The population in England doubled during Victoria's reign, and there could be seen a change in the country's economy because of the eruptions of industries. Hardy, in many of his works reflect on how with the constant flow of people from the rural areas to the urban centres, there also emerged a transition from the conventional Victorian values to a less rigid modern world view. Hardy stands at this transitional period and reflects on the conflicts between rigid Victorian tradition and modern innovation as one can find in the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles.*



14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Hardy depicts the condition of the lower class people through their sense of despair… …the conflict of the rural surroundings with the newly emergent urban life style… …direct expression of the inner life of the poor rural folk against the hypocrisies of the upper class people etc.

Ans to Q No 2: *Wessex* first appears as "a merely realistic dream country" in his novel *Far From the Madding Crowd*… …gradually in his other novels it appears in terms of different regions like South Wessex, Upper- and Mid-Wessex and Nether and Outer Wessex and so on… …it provided him with a literary space to present many significant issues.

Ans to Q No 3: Hardy is often termed a fatalist… …his philosophy on life seems to be guided by Naturalism that portrayed man as ordinary components against the indomitable forces of Nature…. …he also

felt that there is an inherent cruelty in the pattern of the Universe and that human beings are bound by destiny.

Ans to Q No 4: Portrayal of characters is the most striking feature of Hardy's novels… …fixed characters, mostly belonging to Wessex countryside… …rural folks like peasants, shepherds, labourers, singers etc.

Ans to Q No 5: Fatalism and Pessimistic philosophy… …conflict between rural and urban life… …role of chance and coincidences… …Naturalism… …destruction of peasantry and impact of industrialisation… …blend of tradition and modern… …portrayal of Wessex life.

Ans to Q No 6: The professional life, the scholar's life, and the rustic life… …in the first he went through an intense programme of study to equip himself for a career in writing.

Ans to Q No 7: Three phases… …the first phase started with his great novels that won him recognition as a novelist concerned mostly with themes like inscrutable fate, man in conflict with the world etc… …the second phase is the phase when his epic poem *The Dynasts* (1903-1908) was published… …the third phase begins with the publication of his poetry collection *Time's Laughing Stocks* in 1909.

Ans to Q No 8: Novels of Character or Environment… …Romances and Fantasies… … Novels of Ingenuity and Experiment.

Ans to Q No 9: John Durbeyfield's tracing the roots of their family to aristocratic origin… …Death of Prince… …The haggling business of the family got disrupted and so Tess, though reluctant, had to go to the d'Urbervilles family to seek job and also to claim kinship.

Ans to Q No 10: Tess was cordially welcomed by Richard Crick, the master of the Talbothays farm… …Tess met a lot of other milkmaids who became her friends… …Tess met Angel Clare, an apprentice at the Dairy farm… … affinity develops between Tess and Angel… …growing fondness leads to Angel's declaration of love for Tess.

Ans to Q No 11: This phase shows how patriarchy works… …Angel who had an early affair with a girl cannot accept Tess after learning about her past…. …finally Angel decided upon a separation.



14.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Provide a detailed idea of Thomas Hardy's development as a Victorian novelist with particular reference to his fiction.

Q 2: What significance does the term 'Wessex' hold for Thomas Hardy? Write a note on hardy's Wessex novels.

Q 3: Discuss the critical reception of Thomas Hardy as a Victorian novelist with reference to his *Tess of the d'Urbervilles.*

Q 4: Hardy is equally significant as a writer of tragedy? Do you think that Tess has a 'tragic flaw', or is she better understood as a victim of external circumstances? Elaborate.

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