

## **AN INSIGHT OF MARXIST-FEMINISM IN THOMAS HARDY'S *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES***

**Agnes Lee Yun Ing<sup>1</sup>, Ruzbeh Babae<sup>2</sup> and Kamelia Talebian Sedehi<sup>3</sup>**

*Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication Universiti Putra Malaysia*

*43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*

e-mail: agnesleeyi92@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>; rbabaei30@yahoo.ca<sup>2</sup>; cml\_talebian@yahoo.com<sup>3</sup>

### **ABSTRACT**

Marxist-Feminism highlights the unjustifiable inequality faced by the working class citizen. The effect is especially evidently shown on women who have been subjugated and oppressed in so many ways by men. This study addresses the issues of subjugation and subordination faced by Tess, the Victorian woman, in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The impact of cultural hegemony is carefully structured and presented by Marxist-Feminism. Such constructed ideology is brilliantly created to show the misleading superiority of men over women. The huge influence of Capitalism in the 19th Century is shown through the treatment women received in both public and private spheres. The active enrolments of women as Productive and Reproductive labours go unrecognised. Textual evidences are extracted to facilitate, support, and solidify the purpose of study.

Keywords: capitalism, hegemony, marginalization, Marxist-Feminism, subjugation, Victorian Era

### **INTRODUCTION**

Marxist-feminism was first identified when inequality was detected in the society; class system was created among the people; and gaps in economy widens between the poor and the rich. Inequality in distribution of wealth among the people has an especially big impact on the women who suffer from double marginalisation – poverty and gender. Family background also plays an important role in determining the treatment a woman may get from the society. Living in poverty often associates women with low morality and lack of education. Education a woman receives will determine the level of her ability in appreciation of the finer things in life such as the beauty of languages, sewing, and playing musical instruments. Lack in such aspects will contribute to harsh societal judgments. Thus, women with no education are listed as brute and crude.

Furthermore, the fixation on virginity and sexual purity is heavily looked upon. The double-standard of sexual morality has long been established in the society. Women are treated and looked differently from men. The consequences of such unjust treatment lead to the theory of Marxist-Feminism that is the fight for women equality in economy.

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1884) is known for its criticism of social constrains that the Victorian people had to endure. The authority and clergymen are seen to work closely with each other. They are the ones who set the class system in the society. Class conflict arises due to the systems set by the ruling class in accordance with their need to maintain or increase class conflict in order to remain in power. As for Tess, the heroine of the novel, she is rejected by her in-laws because she is of a poor background and works as a dairymaid whereas her in-laws are of the educated and well respectable family. The fixation on virginity and sexual purity from Marxist Historical perspective justifies the rejection faced

by Tess from her in-laws. People from the lower class are seen as the ones with low moral values or none at all. Tess's in-laws seem to practice such beliefs. Hardy is astute in highlighting the flaws he observed in the Victorian society. Social statuses are incredibly important during this era. The rich are often seen walking and talking to people of the same status. The poor, unfortunately, are left to admire the impossible. Marriage must also be done within the same social circle. The rich are not allowed to marry anyone from the lower class as their reputation in the society will be in jeopardy if their offspring marry someone of a different social class. Apart from that, the education one received also reflects the family background. The conflicts found in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* are deemed suitable to be processed and analysed by using Marxist-Feminism that is a direct causal connection between capitalism and the subordination of women.

### **Marxist-Feminism**

The emergence of Marxist-Feminism dated back to late 80s. Benston (1969) and Peggy Morton are the founders and prominent figures in the fight against the issues regarding inequality amongst the people of different social classes and genders. Marxism per se carries its own ideology. Marxism documented a series of inequality faced by humans of all kinds. The retarded system formed by the people in power has ruined the image of the society. Marxism covers a relatively wide scope of related issues. Karl Marx believes everyone who was born in this world shares equal rights before God. No absolute person should overrule another person of a weaker background.

Rules were initially made to exert disciplines and order. Rules were made in the name of God, under a strict supervision and based on God's decrees and principles. Thus, everyone has to obey the rules with no exception to anyone. Needless to say, the temptation of greed and power blinds the ones who hold the ultimate authority of the constitution and law.

Slavery – a norm in the society whereby the masters (males) exudes their power over the slaves (females) in order to satisfy their sexual needs and to ensure procreation of the next heir or generation. The capitalist males, however, require loyalty and fidelity from a non-slave partner. In which, purity and moral values are placed on top of the list as priorities. Often, those who do not possess such innocence are labelled as whore or categorised in the lowest rank as the slaves.

Based on Marxist view, class is defined as production, appropriation and distribution of surplus labour. Therefore, economic processes will be involved. The economic “processes concerned with the production and distribution of goods and services” (Cassano, 2009). On the other hand, gender can be defined based the differences between male and females. As people are classified based on their class in the society, they are distinguished by their gender as well. The way, people contribute in economic process is relevant to their gender. As Mackenzie notes “gender constitution is a process implicated within a complex of productive and reproductive relations, and that women's position can be located in terms of the relation of production and reproduction at various moments in history” (Mackenzie, 1984). Therefore, patriarchy shows its power in household and distribution of power between men and women. Therefore, in Marxist-Feminism, the researcher intends to study the class processes, the gender processes and the interconnection between them.

The biological difference between men and women can ease the way to distribute power. As a result, different attributions are connected to each of these genders. The ideology that differentiates female and male is the focus of Marxist-Feminism. Gender process

happens in all the conditions and situations. Even household chores, being a teacher, nurse and care taker are assigned to women. However, most of the outside jobs are assigned to men. Gender processes are decided by the class processes. As male and female contribute in production, appropriation and distribution of surplus labour can define their understanding of gender. Marxist-Feminism is formed in align to the sub-theories found in Marxism that supports equality as well as Feminism. Marxism is a strong pillar and the backbone of Feminism as they fight the same battle in retaining equality.

### **Tess, the fallen Victorian woman**

The lack of education given to Tess and her immaturity lead her to self-destruction. Sexually-abused at a young age changes the mentality and emotion of such victims. The production of high self-defence mechanism due to such despicable incident has gradually transformed an innocent and free-spirited character to succumb to fear and shame. The insertion of Hardy's own voices in the novel solidifies the agreement made by the author himself. A young woman who was born as a white sheet and filled with purity falls due to lack of proper education and naivety. The morality of Tess magnifies through her innocence. The lack of exposure to the outer world makes her naïve in dealing with new people she meets. The functionality of real society differs from the system she has grown up with – the village. Harvey (2003) also points out;

The Victorian middle class image of women was culturally controlled. They were denied political and economic power, and were expected to conform to the idea of separate spheres for men and women. (p.34)

In *Impact of Class on Life: A Marxist Study of Thomas Hardy's Novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Nazir (2013) points out exploitation of economy is the core factor that leads to the fall of Tess. The intervention of various parties and state authorities has caused the imbalance in the society. The changing and exchanging of different perspectives and mind-sets are the core relation to economy gaps. The implementation of such socio ideology creates a faux façade. The victims are more often than not the less fortunate and of uneducated background. The impact is such that the people who were not made aware of such implementation are forced to learn it through the hard way;

[I]t does not seem to give them any real control over the kind of society or the nature of their economy that they might have preferred. In short the desire for ethnic or cultural autonomy is universal; the political means to satisfy that desire within the integrated world, market economy is not. Many, perhaps most, society have to be content with the mere appearance of autonomy. (Strange, 1996, p.6)

The capitalist society believes that men should be the chosen ones who hold, mould, and shape what believes to be the laws. Concerning the psyche of the Capitalists, we have to dig deeper into the history of England. The long monarch hierarchy is one of the factors that should be taken into consideration. The monarchy as well as the high standing profile figures who receive benefits and privileges. This, in return, causes the proletariat, middle working class people to have the want to be on par with the mentioned people with ranks and titles given by the ruler. As a denotation to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's words, "Our laws and

constitutions, our creeds and codes, and the custom of social life are all of masculine origin?" (Schneir, 1996, p.28). A rightfully made set of laws would not create uproars. However, as we look into the history, people at the time were unsatisfied and helpless but to obey.

Marxist-Feminism aims to highlight and untangle the knot – injustice faced by fellow human beings. Marxist-Feminism necessitates the urge for changes in the ‘advanced’ society. Marxism and Feminism carry a similar vision – to banish social inequality. The combination of two very individualistic and strong criticisms could only mean one thing – strive for the betterment of the poorly treated people. According to Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, he presents the outcome of his analysis as such;

[W]omen are originally equal to, if not more powerful than, men in communal forms of production with matrilineal family organizations. Women lose power when private property comes into existence as a mode of production. Men's control of private property, and the ability thereby to generate a surplus, changes the family form to a patriarchal one where women, and often slaves, become the property of the father and husband. (Engels, 1972)

As presented, the connection between Marxism and Feminism is made stronger when two criticisms are combined. The reliance is such that both needs each other in order to send the intended messages across and to achieve their main goal – to create awareness to the people that the main reason of subjugation and oppression are the greed of the capitalists. The highlight should be on the domineering capitalists who hold the remote controller. Changes in law are necessary to keep them tightly secure in the place and to ensure they will always on hold to the power and highest authority in a society. Undeniably, agreed minor changes were performed between Marxist theory and Feminist theory to align with each different but rather similar principles. The idea of freeing people from the grasp of corrupted society and lead them to liberty gives endless hopes.

Marxist Feminist puts the spotlight on the neglected and undervalued women, especially those who are in the workforce. Sexism are born out of the capitalist society and according to MacKinnon in *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*;

There is a difference between a society in which sexism is expressed in the form of female infanticide and a society in which sexism is expressed in the form of unequal representation on the Central Committee. (MacKinnon, 1989, P.10)

*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* has been investigated through the lens of Feminism and Marxism separately by various scholars around the world. The combination of two prominent criticisms creates a thin perilous line – confusion. Marxism and Feminism are dangerously known to possess almost similar ideologies in these two different theories. In fact, Feminism and Marxism are interlinked in both real world and ideologies. The saying goes, ‘money is the root to all evil’. The father and founder of Marxist theory, Karl Marx himself had witnessed the causes and consequences of inequality in the hierarchy of social classes in the society. The rich will always be on top oppressing the poor. Products yielded by presumably the poor and uneducated will be made as profits gained by the bourgeoisies.

Double marginalisation faced by women in the 19th Century as well as the protagonist is evidently executed to which Tess utters to Angel: "But if it should reach the ears of your friends at Emminster that you are walking about like this with me, a milkmaid—" (Hardy, 2012, p.232)

The tone clearly depicts the acknowledgement Tess has of her humble background and occupation. The social gap between Tess and Angel halts Tess from accepting Angel as her husband. As far as the concerns goes, the Clares are placed amongst the high social standing figures. The conflict is such that preservation of the noble bloodlines is inevitable and necessary. Previously, the discussion highlights on the banishment of people who could no longer contribute to the landlords and the owners of the lands. Here, the conflict is to retain their heirs from making themselves seem crude and lower themselves to the level of on par with the people of no ranks. An excellent example would be;

[...] I do entreat you to endeavour to keep as much as possible in touch with moral ideals. Farming, of course, means roughing it externally; but high thinking may go with plain living, nevertheless. (Hardy, 2012, p.191)

The remarks made by Felix, Angel's brother clearly shows that he has observed differences in his brother and wishes his brother not to succumb to the thinking of lower ranked people. This is further supported by another observation made by his brother on him, they saw;

He was getting to behave like a farmer; [...]. The manner of the scholar had nearly disappeared; still the more the manner of the drawing-room young man. A prig would have said that he had lost culture, and a prude that he had become coarse. Such was the contagion of domiciliary fellowship with the Talbothays nymphs and swains. (Hardy, 2012, p.198)

The disagreement expresses Angel's brothers in seeing a degradation of himself to a farmer's rank. Marxist theory argues that the prevailed inequality in a society should be eradicated as humans are all the same in the eyes of God. Wealth, jobs opportunities, and educations should be distributed equally amongst the creatures of God. However, as shown above, evidently the two elder sons of the clergyman do not agree to that. "Angel's growing social ineptness worries the brothers. They wish to preserve their family dignity and social status by denigrating Angel's newly adapted body language and behaviour. By using Marxist-Feminist approach, we could see that sexism is never too far away from a man. The emphasis on the ladies' innocence and purity weight heavily. In *Why Are Women Oppressed*, Anna Jonasdottir quotes D.H Lawrence;

Man is willing to accept woman as an equal, as a man in skirts, as an angel, a devil, a baby-face, a machine, an instrument, a bosom, a womb, a pair of legs, a servant, an encyclopaedia, an ideal or an obscenity; the only thing he won't accept her as is a human being, a real human being of the real sex. (Jonasdottir, 1994, P.31)

An object, a mere private property of men, the branding for women never cease. The case is made worse with the declination of a woman's origin and family background. In order to be highly valued by men, a woman need to be educated with qualifications as that of Mercy Chant, the deemed potential wife by Mr. and Mrs. Clare to their youngest son, Angel. In addition, the family social standing amongst the society is considerably important as well. As the observation goes, Angel who chooses to divert himself from the social stigma of being a social 'dogmatist' (Hardy, 2012, p.191). As far as the society is concerned, clergymen and people with power and authority are 'servants of corruption' (Hardy, 2012, p.384). They are seen to 'have escaped the pollutions of the world, are again entangled therein and overcome – whose latter end is worse than their beginning?' (Hardy, 2012, p.384). The new generations of people with money and high social rankings are proven to be the benefactors of the corrupted society. To bring back the equilibrium of humanity is to first eradicate the dead leaves of a plant. Angel is the by-product of the seed which society had planted. To which he expresses, "I wish half the women in England were as respectable as you." (Hardy, 2012, p.287).

The statement made by Angel shows Angel does not like nor would show interest on women with low morality. The hypocrisy is such that when Tess reveals the truth of her being "not what in a common parlance is called a lady" (Hardy, 2012, p.196), he loses the alleged claims he said himself to be. This shows that purity and innocence is an unspoken taboo yet highly demanded. Tess' charms and Angel's love are nothing when Angel realises the harsh reality is not acceptable in the society. Dignity of a man is far more important than having to understand the traumatic aftermath of the raping incident his wife had experienced. To which he says: "O, Tess – you are too, too – childish – unformed – crude, I suppose! I don't know what you are. You don't understand the law – you don't understand!" (Hardy, 2012, p.284).

The above expression by Angel displays the mortification Angel is going through. He is afraid of the judgements society would throw at him. His family name and dignity suddenly comes to him to be defended, as if marrying an improper lady is the cause of his family's downfall in the social standings. The emphasis of defending and retaining the high social status is beyond comparison in a capitalist society. The trepidation Angel feels whilst envisaging the degradation of his family in the social ladder which they had climbed so high and might fall any minute now as he has made a mistake of marrying an improper lady, 'a cottager's daughter' (p.196) as predicted by Tess: "[t]hey might feel it a hurt to their dignity." (p.232). In addition, the words uttered by Angel's father also plays a huge role in making Angel the more suffering and agonizing when he recalls he had indeed made a huge mistake by marrying Tess.

Readers could witness a remorseful Angel. He could maintain in his wealthy position, further his studies to the University and becomes a respectable clergyman rather than being an unnecessary complex situation like this. To which Angel articulates, "My position – is this, I thought – any man would have thought – that by giving up all ambition to win a wife with social standing, with fortune, with knowledge of the world, I should secure rustic unsophistication as surely as I should secure pink cheeks; but – [...]" (Hardy, 2012, p.283);

"This belief was confirmed by his experience of women, which, having a latterly been extended from the cultivated middle-class into the rural community, had taught him how much less was the intrinsic difference between the good and wise woman of one

social stratum and the good and wise woman of another social stratum, than between the good and bad, the wise and the foolish, of the same stratum of class. (Hardy p. 197-198)

This statement highlights the importance of maintaining a high social status is far too great to be dismissed. The emphasis is too great to be bore, moreover, when it is the dignity of Clares that is at stake in Angel's hands.

The ailing society wishes to see the downfall of a woman. Women with no morality and purity are always up to their harsh judgments. Tess bears no such ill will to tarnish Angel's family and to degrade them in the societal ladder. The oppression posed on Tess is unbearable to the extent she needs to justify herself to Angel, saying, "I am only a peasant by position, not by nature!" The moment when she revealed her past to Angel, Angel has categorised and labeled her as a 'wicked' (p.284) woman though she tried to explain that she "was a child – a child when it happened! I knew nothing of men." (p.276). Needless to say, Angel being a patriarchal guy who was raised in a capitalist family chooses to explain that he did not think of Tess as a 'deceitful' woman (p.276).

Inequality is by no means applies to the social gaps between the higher ranked figures and lower ranked people, and vastly applies to woman who intends to be not only a reproductive labour in the private sphere of a home and family but a productive labour who could work to earn extra income to feed and support her family. To be looked down upon by the potential employer(s) seems to be a norm for women when it comes to requesting for a job. The same incident occurs to Tess when Mr. Crick 'surveyed her up and down.' (p.126). To which, Mr. Crick poses a rather provocative question, "Quite sure you can stand it? 'Tis comfortable enough here for rough folk; but we do not live in a cucumber frame." (Hardy, 2012, p.126).

In accordance to Marxist Feminist theory, women are punished with oppressions in a capitalist society; due to her background as well as gender. When Tess has run out of allowances given by Angel, she could not ask for more from her in-laws. Firstly, it is due to the reluctance of Angel's family from meeting her on the wedding day. Thus, they have never saw her and could not phantom her appearance. The objection is clearly projected and lined to show the marriage does not gain approvals and nods from the Clares. Moreover, Tess understands that they could never give an approval to provide her with allowances due to the differences of their social standings. Upon seeing the fallen of Durbeyfield family, Alec D'Urbervilles offers help to Tess. Note that Alec offers his help as a way of 'repaying' (p.423) Tess for his past. To which Tess rejects it by saying, "I shall not come – I have plenty of money! At my father's in-law, if I ask for it." (p.423). But, knowing Tess well, Alec indifferently replies, "If you ask for it. But you won't, Tess; I know you; you'll never ask for it – you'll starve first." (p.423). The desperation of earning money to support her family and not rely on Alec forces her to search for a job to sustain. However, due to her gender, the farmer's wife accepts her under the condition – she has to accept lower priced salary: "Female field-labour was seldom offered now, and its cheapness made it profitable for tasks which women could perform as readily as men." (Hardy, 2012, p.337).

Marxist-Feminist fights for equality of womenfolk in both public and private spheres. Women were born and taught of enthralling herself to the man she loves. The notion that it has to have a limit often blurred out as men would not have allowed. Majority of the women are found to be the submissive of their husband-spouse as portrayed by Tess. She is a willing

submissive to Alec. On two different occasions, Tess from the beginning has low confidence and self-esteem. She confesses that she is by-and-by 'not a – proper woman.' (p.422). The rampant and seem-to-be-normal norm of practised sexism is invalid at times. Women are oppressed to the state of not willing to fight but succumb to the norm as that of Tess. In an occasion with Alec, she apathetically says; "I will obey you like your wretched slave, even it is to lie down and die." (p.274). Meanwhile, in another occasion, she says; "[n]ow punish me! Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim – that's the law." (p.394). Clearly, this shows that Tess is aware of the biased set of laws that has arbitrarily states that men will always have the control over women and that nothing could be done to change it. Marxist Feminist chooses to highlight these issues as the embedded of such ideas is severely wrong to begin with. People are made equally despite differences in gender.

Objectification of women as private properties of men is seen as a norm in the 19th Century. Men hold the ultimate power and control over a woman's life. Just as what Alec has over Tess: "Remember, I was your master once! I will be your master again. If you are any man's wife you are mine." (Hardy, 2012, p.394).

In the extract above, Alec is found to have no hesitation to claim back Tess in his life. It is obvious evident that in the eyes of Alec, Tess is a mere object. Moreover, women are prone to blindly believe the ideologies that her husband believes in without questions to it. To which, Alec points out to Tess, "The fact is whatever your dear husband believed you accept, and whatever he rejected you reject, without the least inquiry or reasoning on your own part. That's just like you women. Your mind is enslaved to his." (Hardy, 2012, p.381).

## CONCLUSION

The aforementioned Marxist-Feminism highlights the denotation of such ideology. The connotation at the mention of Marxist-Feminism is to create an equal and humane society. Human rights should be respected and protected despite the existing class system which threatens to widen the gap between the poor and the rich.

The notion that family status is closely related to the morality of a female is apprehensible but misleading. The female protagonist in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is portrayed as a country girl with no proper education and teaching provided to heighten her social standings. The result of her parents' negligence is the double marginalisation and oppression she had to suffer from throughout her lifetime. As delicately penned down by Hardy, she suffers from double marginalisation of being a female and born in an uneducated farmer family. The ignorance of general knowledge to protect herself from Alec comes subsequently with a greater consequence which she has to bear until her final day.

People of higher standings in the societal ladder carry preponderant influences. However, the sense of authority and in power was not used accordingly in the 19th Century. The given privileges were used to benefit their interests. The results are the prominent cruel treatments the poor had to endure silently without objections. Demonstrations and rallies on the streets was a rare sight and forbidden under the arbitrary laws set by the authority. The spinning wheel is such that the rich gets the profits from the labours the poor poured in. Ultimately, Tess is the walking example and victim to such conditions. She wills herself to both reproductive and productive labours. She works under the harsh circumstances and weather to support herself when she runs out of the money provided by Angel. Evidently, it



is her and her employer's last resorts. A win-win situation is enacted. However, Tess is an underpaid worker by her employer due to her gender.

Capitalism is a practice that is still prevalent in the 21st Century. Karl Marx is hailed from Russia, however, he beheld Capitalism as a disease that spares no country should no awareness could be raised. Generically speaking, human is created and born with senses and instincts to hunt and win over another species or own species for the worse. All is to preserve and secure their positions in the social standings. Today, the most prominent Capitalist country which leads the world is the United States of America.

On contradiction to the successful Capitalist country, countries which still practicing socialism are no longer shadowed by the stereotypical backward thinking. Admittedly, the equal distribution of wealth to all citizens guarantees a united force within the country. Only one leader is needed to rule the country, in an uncontested election. People who live in such country do not recognise the hardship of being poor or enjoyment of being rich. Generally, greed of power and money is not recognisable thus the peaceful and harmony human interactions and relationships in the society.

Democracy is honoured as an ideal ideology which technically could lead to less disputes and more equality. Countless of countries around the world tried to practise democracy, many unsuccessfully prosecuted. 'Money is the root to all evil' hits the bullseye. As found in many cases, money is deemed to mislead even the brightest human. A profound research finds that the greed of power and money could also lead to making lies after lies to cover the previous wrongdoings of corruptions, bribery or money laundering. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* portrays a similar plot and situation to the audience, whereby the core factor to disparity and gaps between the poor and rich is corruption. Misuse of the assigned authority leading the convicts to thinking it is their 'rights' to enjoy such 'privilege'. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the despicable act of corruption and unlawful transactions between clergymen and unnamed authorities. To make matter worse, education is set as the benchmark from the beginning of the book. Tess is looked down due to her poor background and lack of wisdom in the intellectual field. It is thereafter mentioned that only the rich are awarded the privilege to enter university. Such distinction has been created back in the 19th Century to preserve the lines of rich and honourable families.

The fact that the aforementioned issues are closely interlinked is not surprising as the issues have long lingered around us on daily basis. Audience need not travel back in time to witness such horrible occasion whereby female were oppressed due the lack of education and poor family backgrounds. It has come to our enlightenment that in the 21st Century, it is no longer the feminist activists who roam on the streets fighting for justice, creating awareness and to demand the equality rights, for both men and women. The educated, the less literate class, the poor and the rich, all walks of life come together as one to fight for equality for women. And, to do so the distribution of wealth in the economic sector should be fair. This is to close the wide gap between the rich and poor. The wider the gap the bigger the discrimination held to oppress. With the issues of class system and gender discrimination, morality comes close. As per discussed in the previous chapters, Tess is a good example to highlight the close relations between the trio. Money and education are the benchmarks for morality. In short, if you had none, you are of a no morale woman.

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