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Violence Against Woman In Thomas Hardy's Work Tess Of The D'Urbervilles

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Abstrak

This research examines the forms of violence against women in Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles through the perspective of radical feminism as proposed by Rosemarie Tong (2009). The focus of the research is directed toward the depiction of Tess's experiences as the main character who encounters physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal violence, while also exploring how the patriarchal social system influences the course of her life and destiny. The purpose of this research is to analyze how patriarchal power, as reflected through male characters and social institutions such as family, religion, and marriage, shapes Tess's position as a woman who becomes a victim in a society biased against women, as well as to identify the various forms of violence experienced by Tess Durbeyfield in Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles. The approach applied is descriptive qualitative with the method of content analysis, in which the data are taken from narrative quotations, dialogues, and character interactions that portray practices of gender-based injustice. The findings reveal that Tess's suffering is not merely the result of individual actions but is rooted in gender inequality institutionalized through cultural traditions, rigid social norms, and male dominance. Although Tess attempts to assert self-awareness, resilience, and courage to resist, her struggle often ends in defeat due to the strong grip of patriarchal values. In conclusion, Tess of the d'Urbervilles not only presents the tragic story of a woman's life but also serves as a sharp social critique of gender-based power imbalances in the Victorian era, while remaining relevant in addressing discussions on gender equality and violence against women today.

Keywords: Novel, feminism, radical, patriarchy, violence

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I INTRODUCTION

The issue of injustice against women remains a highly relevant topic and continues to require serious attention to this day. Jiniya (2019) emphasizes that women often become victims of various forms of violence, including physical, verbal, and psychological abuse. In societies that are undergoing value shifts or where patriarchy is deeply rooted, women tend to occupy very vulnerable positions. Frequently, women not only suffer losses but are also blamed for social problems that should be the collective responsibility of society. Many women still experience oppression and are deprived of space to voice their experiences. When their voices are silenced, their suffering becomes invisible. Amid the complexity of social life, women are often left to face pressures that men typically do not encounter. They are expected to conform to traditional roles and norms, while at the same time being denied the freedom to make decisions about their own lives. This phenomenon is also evident in cases of violence against women worldwide today, where victims are often blamed, such as in instances of sexual harassment where women are accused because of their clothing or behavior.

Despite rapid progress and modernization, the bitter reality remains. Violence against women has not shown a significant decline. Even in societies that appear advanced and civilized, women continue to face discrimination and unjust treatment. Many acts of violence occur within the home, in the workplace, and in social environments that should provide safety. Women are often perceived as weak and incapable of making their own decisions. The violence they experience is frequently normalized and justified by masculine cultural and social structures. Reports from various women's protection agencies reveal that the majority of perpetrators are in fact the victims' closest relatives, who should have been responsible for their safety. Cannon, Lauve-Moon, and Buttell (2015) stress that this fact demonstrates that violence against women is not merely an individual issue but one deeply rooted in cultural and social systems.

Such conditions cannot be separated from prevailing social constructions, particularly in patriarchal societies such as Victorian England. At that time, women were restricted to very limited social spaces. They were viewed as guardians of

family morality, expected to become faithful wives and good mothers. However, they were not granted equal rights in education, employment, or politics. Women who became involved in social scandals, such as out-of-wedlock pregnancies or those who were victims of sexual abuse, were often condemned by society, even though they were victims themselves. The moral standards of that era placed a heavy burden on women, while men who committed similar transgressions often escaped serious social consequences. This situation is similar to modern times, where female victims of violence are more frequently criticized for their mistakes than male perpetrators, illustrating that the legacy of patriarchal thinking persists to this day (Valero et al., 2025).

In the realm of literature, the injustices faced by women have long served as a central theme, explored both explicitly and implicitly by many writers. Literature functions as an effective medium for reflecting social realities while also delivering criticism toward unjust social structures. Through literary works, the silenced voices of women can be revived and heard. Characters and narratives in literature can represent women's suffering and reveal how they are often trapped in the position of victims within biased social systems. Thomas Hardy, one of the most prominent writers of the Victorian era, employed his works to critique patriarchal culture and highlight the injustices endured by women. Similarly, modern feminism functions as "living literature" in society, voicing the experiences of women victims of violence, criticizing patriarchal structures, and fighting for gender justice in various aspects of life. This aligns with the view of Matus, Riberi, and Rojas (2024), who emphasize that literature is an important medium for opening spaces for social critique.

Thomas Hardy is known as a writer who boldly criticized the social norms of his time. Through his works, he vividly portrayed the harsh realities faced by women living in patriarchal societies. One of his most famous novels addressing this issue is **Tess of the d'Urbervilles**. This novel not only recounts the life of a village girl full of suffering but also presents a realistic portrayal of the social injustices experienced by women. Through this story, Hardy attempts to show that women like Tess are often victims of cultural and social

systems that are inherently unfair. They are forced to bear the moral burden of events beyond their control, while society easily judges and ostracizes them. This situation resonates with many real-life accounts of gender-based violence today, in which victims often bear the weight of social stigma, while perpetrators frequently escape proper punishment. This is further reinforced by Sikweyiya et al. (2020), who argue that patriarchy and unequal gender norms fuel gender-based violence in various social contexts.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles tells the story of Tess Durbeyfield, a simple girl from a poor family in the village of Marlott. At first, Tess is depicted as innocent and full of hope. However, her life changes drastically when her father discovers that they are descendants of the noble d'Urberville family. Driven by social ambition, Tess's parents send her to the d'Urberville family with the hope of securing a better future. Unfortunately, her encounter with Alec d'Urberville marks the beginning of prolonged suffering. Alec, who possesses power and influence, deceives and ultimately rapes Tess. This tragic event leaves deep emotional and physical wounds that haunt her throughout her life.

After the incident, Tess is confronted with the bitter reality that society does not stand by her. Instead of receiving support, she is ostracized and labeled as a woman who has lost her honor. Shame, regret, and guilt continue to haunt her. Society places the entire blame on her, as if she alone were responsible for the tragedy that befell her. In her solitude, Tess strives to rebuild her life, but the shadows of her past never truly fade. Even when she falls in love and begins a relationship with Angel Clare, the fear of rejection constantly haunts her, fearing that one day Angel will uncover her past. Lomazzi (2023) explains that this phenomenon illustrates how social stigma traps female victims in layers of suffering, hindering their opportunities for recovery.

Based on the background described above, this research focuses on Tess's life journey as a victim of social pressure as well as on the influence of social structures on her fate and decisions. The reason for choosing this topic is that the novel clearly depicts the harsh realities of women's struggles in facing sexual violence, social stigma, the injustice of double moral standards, and the limited freedom to determine their own lives within a patriarchal society, where forms of gender-based oppression are often regarded as normal. This work is not only of high literary value but also rich in social critique, which is highly relevant in uncovering the structural injustices experienced by women. This aligns with the findings of Sikweyiya et al. (2020), who state that patriarchy and gender-inequitable attitudes remain major drivers of violence against women in various social contexts. The researcher examines this topic because the issues of gender inequality and violence against women portrayed in the novel still reflect realities that persist to this day. Using the perspective of radical feminist literary criticism, this research aims to explore the dynamics of power, gender roles, and systems of oppression as reflected in the novel's narrative. It is expected that this research will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the forms of violence against women, both explicit and implicit, embedded within literary texts. Furthermore, this research seeks to make a meaningful contribution to raising awareness of the importance of gender equality and social justice, particularly in protecting women's rights, which are often neglected in everyday life. In this context, feminism plays an important role as a social movement that not only critiques the patriarchal system but also advocates for policy change, legal reform, and women's empowerment, so that cases of violence against women can be addressed fairly without placing blame on the victims.

II RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Method of Collecting the Data

Data collection was conducted after the researcher determined the research problem and developed a structured work plan. This research utilized the documentation method using secondary data. Kothari (2004:111) defines

secondary data is information that is already available because it has been previously collected and processed by other researcher, usually in the form of written sources such as books, scientific articles, and journals. The primary source of this research is Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the*

d'Urbervilles, while supporting materials were obtained from relevant literature, including Rosemarie Tong's feminist theory book and journal articles discussing literary analysis and radical feminist perspectives. All the information collected was then carefully analyzed to understand the theme of violence against women and how this violence is related to patriarchal domination in the novel.

2.2 Method of Analyzing the Data

This research employs content analysis as the method of data processing, which is part of a qualitative approach and is generally used to examine documents or texts. Kothari (2004:110) states that content analysis is a method used to research the content of documentary materials such as novels, as well as forms of verbal communication, both spoken and written. This method was chosen because it is appropriate for conducting an in-depth analysis of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, with a focus on processing data in the form of words and sentences. In its application, this research involves reading and comprehending the entire text of the novel, highlighting sections relevant to the research focus, examining the forms of violence experienced by the female character, and interpreting the findings through the lens of radical feminist theory. The purpose of this analysis is to provide a clear understanding of the text through the processes of data identification, grouping relevant information, and presenting the results descriptively. Thus, the collected data can be systematically organized, which facilitates the interpretation and presentation of the research findings in a coherent and comprehensive manner.

2.3 Technique of Collecting the Data

The data in this research were collected using documentation techniques by utilizing various types of written materials relevant to the research focus. Creswell (2018) explains that in qualitative research, data collection is generally carried out by systematically organizing documents and texts to optimally support the research objectives. These written materials include scientific articles, novels, journals, and other relevant printed works. In this research, Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* served as the primary data source. In addition, the researcher also used secondary data sources such as reference books, scientific articles, literary critiques, and other supporting documents that function to strengthen and complement the

analysis of the primary data. The researcher thoroughly read the novel to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, characters, and significant events. The text was then reread carefully to highlight sections relevant to the research focus. The selected parts were recorded in a structured format, complete with chapter and page numbers to ensure data accuracy. All the collected information was subsequently organized into a table so that the data processing could be conducted in a more systematic and orderly manner.

2.4 Technique of Analyzing the Data

In this research, the researcher applied a data analysis technique using an interpretative approach. Kothari (2004:344) explains that interpretation is the process of drawing conclusions from collected data with the aim of uncovering broader meanings from research findings. Through this technique, the researcher seeks to provide logical and rational interpretations of the data by first explaining the relationships that appear in the text and then uncovering the underlying meanings. This process includes describing the life experiences of the main character, Tess Durbeyfield, as portrayed in the novel, so that the main issue of the research namely the various forms of violence against woman can be more clearly identified. Additional information obtained during the research was also considered to enrich the understanding of the issues being studied. Therefore, the researcher reread the text carefully and recorded every event that illustrated Tess's suffering and injustice. The interpretation stage was carried out thoroughly to avoid hasty conclusions, accompanied by a re-examination of each form of violence experienced by the main character so that the findings would have a strong and valid foundation.

Through the use of this interpretative technique, the researcher analyzed the different forms of violence experienced by Tess in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The results of the interpretation revealed how the position of women is represented in a society dominated by patriarchal values. From these findings, it can be concluded that Tess represents women as victims of injustice caused by patriarchal domination. Thus, the application of interpretative analysis enabled this research to produce a more comprehensive, structured, and meaningful understanding in accordance with the objectives of the research.

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Patriarchal Domination and the Construction of Tess as a Victim

In Tess of the d'Urbervilles, patriarchy is not merely a passive social backdrop, but actively operates through multiple layers of power that reinforce one another. Male figures such as Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare exemplify how personal relationships can be used to maintain and strengthen the patriarchal order, whether through physical control, emotional manipulation, or moral judgment that disadvantages women. Meanwhile, social institutions including the family, religion, law, and the cultural norms of the Victorian era also play a role in placing Tess in a vulnerable position by imposing double moral standards, restricting her freedom of choice, and assigning her a permanent label as a "fallen woman." The combination of male domination in the private sphere and collective social pressures forms a system of oppression that renders Tess not only a victim of specific incidents, but also a victim of a social structure that systematically restricts and disadvantages women.

3.1.1 Patriarchy by Male Characters

3.1.1.1 Patriarchy by Alec D'urbervilles

In Tess of the d'Urbervilles, the dominance of patriarchy is clearly visible in the way male characters treat women, one example being when Alec remarks to Tess, "*Tess, why do you always dislike my kissing you?*" (Tess of the d'Urbervilles:2005, p. 78). This exchange takes place during a moment where Alec attempts to enforce unwanted physical closeness, ignoring Tess's comfort and right to refuse. His words reveal a deep-seated sense of entitlement, as he views Tess's body as something he can access without restriction and assumes his wishes should naturally be welcomed. Here, sexual dominance is apparent because Alec positions Tess's rejection as an oddity needing explanation, rather than acknowledging it as a valid boundary. At the same time, emotional manipulation surfaces through his subtle pressure in conversation, which undermines Tess's autonomy and frames her resistance as unreasonable. Moral presumption is also evident, with Alec acting as though it is normal for women to accept a man's advances unquestioningly, reinforcing the patriarchal notion that male desire outweighs female agency. From a radical feminist lens, this is far from a

simple disagreement; it reflects how patriarchal culture legitimizes men's control over women's bodies, sustained by societal norms that weaken women's power and romanticize male persistence. Tess's discomfort and firm rejection in this scene serve as an affirmation of her bodily autonomy, directly confronting the expectation of passive compliance, and her act of resistance despite subtle coercion embodies the radical feminist imperative to dismantle systems that grant men authority over women's physical and emotional existence.

3.1.1.2 Patriarchy by Angel Clare

The sentence "*O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case*" (Tess of the d'Urbervilles:2005, p. 248) reflects a form of symbolic violence committed by Angel Clare against Tess, which, from a radical feminist perspective, can be seen as a subtle yet destructive manifestation of patriarchal power. In this situation, Angel firmly closes the possibility of reconciliation after learning about Tess's past, as if the traumatic experience she endured which was, in fact, the result of sexual violence were a moral failing that could never be forgiven. This attitude reveals the deep-rooted power of the double standard, in which Angel positions himself as the authority to judge Tess's moral worth, while the wrongdoings or past of men are often forgiven or even overlooked by society. Such rejection also reinforces the social construct that defines a woman's sexual purity as the primary measure of her worth and honor a standard historically used to control women's bodies and behavior. From the radical feminist perspective of Rosemarie Tong, Angel's action is not merely a personal refusal but a reproduction of patriarchal power that forces women to bear the moral burden and guilt for the violence inflicted upon them. By removing any space for forgiveness, Angel affirms the notion that victims of sexual assault will forever be considered "tainted," leading to both social and emotional alienation. As a result, the emotional bond between Angel and Tess is severed, serving as a reminder that women in a patriarchal society are perpetually under the threat of unequal moral judgment, where their mistakes are magnified while men remain free from such burdens.

3.1.2 Patriarchy by Social Institutions

The quotation “*I don’t altogether think I ought to go,*” said Tess thoughtfully (*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*:2005, p. 51) captures a moment when Tess begins to question a decision that was essentially imposed by her family or by social norms demanding female obedience. By expressing her hesitation, Tess subtly resists institutional authority specifically, family traditions and patriarchal cultural expectations that typically demand unquestioning compliance. From a radical feminist perspective, this doubt is not merely a personal choice but a form of resistance against a social system that places women in subordinate positions. Patriarchal structures embedded in family, customs, and social rules function to restrict women’s freedom to make their own decisions. By voicing her hesitation, Tess asserts her right to personal autonomy, independent thought, and the freedom to make her own choices. This small but significant act reflects a radical feminist awareness that women must reject institutional domination that limits their liberty and strive to gain full control over their bodies, lives, and decisions.

3.2 Forms of Violence Experienced by Tess

3.2.1 Physical/Sexual Violence

Tess must bear a heavy physical burden and excessive work-related violence when she states, “*I killed the horse, and I suppose I ought to do something*” (*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*:2005, p. 53). In this situation, she is forced to shoulder both the physical consequences and the responsibility for an incident that was actually beyond her control, resulting in significant physical and mental strain. This condition reflects a reality often experienced by women, who are placed in vulnerable positions and expected to carry out work or bear consequences disproportionately, while men do not always face the same repercussions. From a radical feminist perspective, Tess’s experience highlights how social structures normalize the exploitation of women, including burdening them with excessive physical labor and responsibilities that rightfully should not be theirs. Radical feminism emphasizes that the oppression of women is systemic and structural, meaning such pressures are not merely individual issues but part of broader social patterns that maintain women in subordinate positions. In this context, Tess

represents women who are compelled to endure both physical and moral burdens due to systemic injustice, while also illustrating the importance of awareness and resistance against social structures that limit their freedom, well-being, and autonomy.

3.2.2 Verbal Violence

The quotation “*you artful hussy!... I’ll swear you did!...Then D’urbervilles cursed...he could think of...*” (*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*:2005, p. 62) illustrates the verbal and psychological violence experienced by Tess at the hands of Alec. In this scene, Alec hurls insulting, accusatory, and emotionally attacking words that impose significant psychological pressure and fear upon Tess. These degrading remarks not only undermine her dignity as a woman but also highlight how women are often targets of emotional manipulation and verbal abuse that can leave long-lasting trauma. From a radical feminist perspective, Alec’s behavior reflects systemic male domination, in which humiliation, intimidation, and psychological pressure are used as tools to maintain control and assert power over women. Such verbal violence threatens the victim’s self-confidence, emotional stability, and psychological integrity, while underscoring the need for critical awareness and resistance against non-physical forms of abuse that persist within social structures placing women in vulnerable positions. This scene demonstrates how words can become as powerful a weapon as physical violence, forcing women to endure heavy psychological burdens simply because societal norms normalize male dominance.

3.2.3 Visual Violence

The passage “*She mercilessly snipped her eyebrows off...*” (*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*:2005, p. 299) shows Tess deliberately changing her appearance to make herself less appealing to men, reflecting her response to unwanted attention and societal pressures surrounding female beauty. This behavior represents a form of visual self-directed violence, as Tess internalizes the expectations and control imposed by a male-centered society, taking active steps to prevent further objectification or harassment. Through a radical feminist lens, this moment reveals how patriarchal structures shape women’s actions and self-image, pushing them to regulate their own bodies in order to navigate social and sexual

power imbalances. Tess's self-inflicted change underscores the heavy psychological and emotional toll of living under constant observation, indicating that visual violence is not only exerted externally through the male gaze but can also be internalized, prompting women to act against their own interests in an effort to protect themselves. Moreover, this act demonstrates the overlap of physical, visual, and symbolic violence, as her alteration serves both as a defensive measure and a reflection of internalized oppression. It highlights how patriarchal norms compel women to monitor and control their own bodies, generating prolonged emotional strain, reduced self-esteem, and restricted autonomy. This scene illustrates the extensive reach of patriarchal influence, where even deeply personal decisions about appearance are shaped by societal pressures, exposing the profound psychological consequences of persistent objectification and judgment in a male-dominated world.

3.2.4 Symbolic/Moral Violence

The excerpt "*I feel so tenderly for you...*" (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*:2005, p. 370) portrays Alec continuing his harassment of Tess

under the guise of having repented, exposing the manipulative and predatory aspects of his character. In this instance, Alec masks coercion and control with a façade of affection, deliberately using his words to manipulate Tess's emotions and exploit her trust. His speech is crafted to disorient and emotionally destabilize her, making it challenging for Tess to maintain her autonomy or resist his influence. Viewed through a radical feminist lens, this episode illustrates how patriarchal systems allow men to exert power over women via psychological and emotional tactics, even when feigning remorse. Tess must navigate layers of fear, uncertainty, and pressure, intensifying the mental and emotional strain placed upon her. Furthermore, this passage emphasizes the subtle yet persistent nature of emotional abuse, showing that verbal and emotional manipulation can inflict harm comparable to physical coercion. It also highlights the broader structural issue where women's independence and emotional security are repeatedly compromised by male dominance, demonstrating how patriarchal oppression pervades personal relationships and perpetuates cycles of exploitation and control over women.

IV CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion, this research arrives at two main conclusions. First, patriarchal domination represented through male characters and social institutions such as family, religion, and marriage plays a significant role in shaping Tess's position as a victim within society. Alec d'Urberville demonstrates a harsh form of domination through sexual harassment, physical abuse, and emotional manipulation, while Angel Clare embodies a subtler type of control by excessively idealizing Tess and passing moral judgment on her. At the same time, social institutions that should serve to protect women instead reinforce patriarchal values, rendering Tess increasingly vulnerable and powerless. This indicates that the oppression experienced by Tess does not merely originate from individuals but is deeply rooted in the broader social structures and patriarchal culture that restrict women's freedom.

Second, the various forms of violence experienced by Tess Durbeyfield include physical abuse, sexual harassment, emotional manipulation, verbal humiliation, and restrictions imposed by discriminatory social norms. These forms of violence cause profound suffering for Tess, both psychologically and socially, ultimately reinforcing her position as a victim of injustice within the patriarchal system. From the perspective of radical feminism, Tess's experiences affirm that violence against women is not an isolated act but part of a systemic framework that legitimizes male domination and relegates women to a subordinate position. Thus, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* not only presents the tragic story of a woman's life but also serves as a sharp critique of gender inequality and patriarchal oppression, issues that remain relevant today.

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