

**SIGNIFICANCE OF COINCIDENCES IN HARDY'S NOVEL****TESS OF D'URBERVILLES**

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Hardy's novels often appeal to the readers on account of the philosophy of life that they offer. To be more precise and direct, the readers' response depends on the philosophy of life as they receive from the novels. Most often the discussion happens on why and how Hardy constructs his plots leaning more on to 'Fate', 'Destiny', 'Chance' and 'Coincidence'. When we put these terms in a proper perspective for better understanding, any incidence is a coincidence as it happens due to chance and it is received as destiny which is the imposition of fate. So, one way of understanding is that 'coincidence' is the visible manifestation of fate and 'fate' is the invisible source of all coincidences. 'Chance' and 'destiny' are the interpretative tools or assumptions that try to explain the causative link between 'coincidence' and 'fate'. The present article aims at highlighting the significance of 'coincidences' that have lead to a series of tragic events in the life of Tess and make the novel seemingly unreasonable but highly impacting on the minds of the readers.

Keywords: *Coincidence, Chance, Fate, Destiny, Hardy***Citation:**

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INTRODUCTION

Hardy's novels often appeal to the readers on account of the philosophy of life that they offer. To be more precise and direct, the readers' response depends on the philosophy of life as they receive from the novels. Most often the discussion happens on why and how Hardy constructs his plots leaning more on to 'Fate', 'Destiny', 'Chance' and 'Coincidence'. Let us first look at the way Oxford dictionary defines these words. Thereafter, it will be easy and advantageous to analyse the way these concepts in general and 'Coincidences' in particular are used in the novel *Tess of D'urbervilles*.

The relevant definitions of the above mentioned terms, as mentioned in the Oxford Dictionary, endorse: *Coincidence* is the fact of two things happening at the same time by chance, in a surprising way. *Chance* is the way that some things happen without any cause that you can see and understand. *Fate* is the power that is believed to control everything that happens and that cannot be stopped or changed. *Destiny* is what happens or what will happen to somebody especially things that they cannot change or avoid. The above meanings/definitions establish that they are complementary and supplementary to one another. Let me put these terms in a proper perspective for better comprehensibility. Any incidence is a coincidence as it happens due to chance and it is received as destiny which is the imposition of fate (Pack). So, one way of understanding this aspect is that 'coincidence' is the visible manifestation of fate and 'fate' is the invisible source of all coincidences. 'Chance' and 'destiny' are the interpretative tools or assumptions that try to explain the causative link between 'coincidence' and 'fate'. As this is true with life, it can be true with any literary work.

Men of letters are bound to employ coincidences to have an effective plot. However, some of them (writers) may appear to have gone over inclined on to the coincidences. In some novels, where the writer uses coincidences to have complete control on the plot, the writer is forced to explain and interpret the invisible controlling power. Hardy's novel *Tess of D'urbervilles* is one of such novels in which coincidences dictate the course and intensity of action, all through the story. The present article

aims at highlighting the significance of 'coincidences' that have lead to a series of tragic events in the life of Tess and makes the novel seemingly unreasonable but highly impacting on the minds of the readers.

THE ROLE OF COINCIDENCE IN THIS STORY

In the novel *Tess of D'urbervilles*, 'Coincidences' have played a very significant role in the life of Tess which has lead to a great suffering in her life and to her tragedy (Gao). The coincidence is external when some concrete incident happens and it becomes internal depending on the way a character or an individual receives it. Tess is subjected to quite a few such incidents at regular intervals that work as coincidences sometimes externally and sometimes internally and at times both ways (Vesleski).

"God or destiny, or the universal process, is represented as though deliberately manipulating events to frustrate and mock the protagonist (Saxema & Dixit, 2001, p. 37)" (Vesleski)

Almost all the coincidences of importance can be related to the hostile nature of fate. The very first coincidence which initially appears to be good for Tess and her members of the family turns out to be fatalistic in the end (Gao). That is, Tess' parents have learnt that John, Tess' father, is a descendent of a rich and grand dynasty named D'urbervilles. In fact, any individual or family feels fortunate to have belonged to such a rich and grand dynasty. In her parents' case, it is more so true as they are not very well placed in life in many ways. When this one coincidence is analyzed, it unfolds into a series of coincidences. Beach opines that Hardy "often out-Herods Herod" and projects his use of coincidence as "the crisscross of circumstances that come to upset the plans and betray the best intentions of the characters".

John, father of Tess, has come to know from a local parson that he belongs to the D'urbervilles and he starts celebrating the news in a bar by taking wine, leaving his routine job/s. His wife Joan, mother of Tess, also joins him in having drinks and plans to make mileage out the new revelation. Finding the parents in such a condition that too late in the night, being the eldest one in the family, Tess takes the responsibility of her father's job of transportation which is dependent on Prince, the horse that pulls



their cart. In the process, on the way, they are met with an accident and Prince, the only source of their livelihood, has met with an untimely death (Jing). Tess feels guilty that she is responsible for the loss of Prince and she has to make sure that her parents and siblings should not suffer on that account. Consequently, though unwillingly, she is made to accept to her parents' proposal of seeking a relation with the D'urbervilles. That, in turn, leads to many unpleasant coincidences and ultimately to her tragic death.

John's intoxicated condition, cart meeting with an accident, death of Prince etc, appear to be external coincidences as they are concrete and visible. However, we do not find any logical answers to the questions like: why the parson has informed John of that news at that time; why John has celebrated the news for such a long with wine; why Tess has taken her father's responsibility without being asked; why the accident has happened on that particular occasion; why only Prince has happened to die in the accident; why Tess has felt guilty of turning her family into starvation and accepted the proposal; and why she could not protect herself from Alec. We may rationalise by considering them coincidences that happen within the self in question. Thus, it is a series of coincidences that takes the form, tone and tenor of fate, and subjects Tess to suffering and unhappiness which is the theme projected in the novel (Gao).

Another major coincidence is the episode that unfolds at the dairy farm. After the bitter experience with Alec, she comes back home to her parents only to find them in miserable conditions. Alec continues his efforts to take the undue advantage further from the living conditions of her family. Her mother is innocently worried about the missed chance of Tess marrying Alec. At that time, Tess finds a job in a dairy farm and leaves her home and joins there as dairy maid. She joins as dairy maid with an intention to help her family financially and she hopes a peaceful life for herself. But, she is made to meet another man named Angel Clare, the owner of the dairy farm. She tries her best to avoid him without any success. Angel finds her very interesting and lovable which is normally not his character. Tess does not respond to Angel Clare's efforts to be close

with her, keeping her past in view. Moreover, she suggests him to court the other girls who are her room mates. But, Angel persists to court her, with his love and with his sincere proposal to marry, in a decent fashion and that allows her to have courage to think about it. After a fairly long time, she accepts to the proposal and decides to inform Angel about her past; but somehow, she fails to tell him. Then she puts it all in black and white in a letter and pushes it into Angel's room hoping that he would be informed of her past and takes a wise and well informed decision. However, unfortunately, the letter gets stuffed under the carpet and never gets surfaced. On his persistence, she marries Angel and hopes a good and peaceful life that she deserves. On the wedding night, Angel reveals his past and Tess also reciprocates and reveals her past expecting his forgiveness. But, Angel fails to do so and abandons her and he leaves for Brazil in search of some new business. Tess is again subjected to hardships and she takes up the jobs which involve hard physical labour in order to keep herself and her family alive (Jing).

Thus, a series of coincidences happen in her marriage episode at the dairy farm which turns her life bad to worse (Gao). These are incidents, if we confine our discussion to what has happened and how they have happened. They become 'coincidences' as we start analysing them from the perspectives of how the individuals in question have received them. Let us consider a few examples. Angel Clare and Tess have met each other earlier but their impressions and feeling about each other have different at that time. When they face each other in the dairy farm episode, they started off with pleasant feelings and tried to be wise and patient before coming to a conclusion and yet they are left with consequences not with results. It is a coincidence they have felt nothing good about each other on the first occasion; it is a coincidence that they have felt good about each other in the dairy farm episode; and it is a coincidence that a very good and matured individual like Angel Clare has failed to reciprocate and forgive Tess. It goes without saying that the letter getting stuffed under the carpet is an expensive coincidence (Sheela). Tess's confidence in revealing her past in response to Angel's revealing of



his past is a coincidence. Angel's abandoning Tess and leaving her to severe unpleasant experiences is a coincidence.

There is another glaring and striking episode of coincidence in the later parts of the novel where Tess tries her best to reach out to Angel Clare in order to get a bit of relief from her predicament. Her letters to Angel Clare seeking some assistance have not received any response. On the contrary, without her effort or even contemplation, she comes in touch with Alec, who is now playing the role of a preacher. Helpless Tess succumbs to his evil designs only to make sure that her members of family are not put to starvation. Further, having learnt about the kind hearted nature of her father-in-law, she decides to ask him for help and leaves for his residence on foot. On her way, she happens to listen to the brothers of Angel Clare who are talking about the unpleasant marriage episode of Angel Clare. As a result, she loses heart and withdraws her efforts to meet the father of Angel Clare and continues to suffer (Borghain).

Similarly, waiting for Angel Clare for a long time, losing all hope, she accepts to be the mistress of Alec only to keep her family alive. At that juncture, out of the blue, Angel Clare surfaces and enquires about the whereabouts of Tess and finally approaches Tess in repentance. However, finding her with Alec, he leaves her to her misery and goes away in frustration. Towards the end of the novel, when Alec, in his intoxication, abused Angel Clare, Tess in a fit of anger kills him. Thus, Hardy's treatment of coincidence is a conscious attempt of the "injections of melodrama designed to infuse some extra liveliness" (Hawkins).

There upon, Tess and Angel Clare live together, in a deserted house in the jungle, happily for a week. Finally, she was captured and hanged to make sure that her crime is addressed and she is subjected to justice. Thus, all her life being good and virtuous she is put to unthinkable trauma and torture. On the other hand, when she murdered her rapist the judiciary or destiny delivered the justice for her crime so sharp and soon (Hardy).

"Hardy believed that nature operates according to the laws that are not only independent of but at times at odds with human desire and the human sense of order (Bonica, 1982, p. 854). The opposition between the inherent programming of the Universe and human wants is the root cause of all suffering. Moreover, as intimacy seems at odds with the very principles of nature, death seems like a logical upshot and a viable way to restore order. The novel famously ends with the scene at Stonehenge where Tess lays down at the altar and yields to her fate by falling asleep. In her surrendering to her fate we have witnessed the freeing of one will, one consciousness, and, as a result, we have witnessed redemption (Veleski)."

CONCLUSION

When we analyse all the incidents and responses to those incidents in the novel, we are bound to call them 'coincidences' which are in no way in the control of the individual in question. The above discussion makes it clear that whether in life or in literature 'coincidences' (some may call them incidents) have their own inevitable significance.

If we keep the question of who controls the happenings and incidents aside, we may focus on how they are received by the individuals. Anyway, individuals sometimes find the sequence of events pleasant and happy, and at times find them unpleasant and miserable. The real problem is in finding a clear logic to the question why we face pleasant or unpleasant life situations. In the story of Tess, she is pitched against a series of such highly unreasonable events, situations, things and people. Therefore, keeping the story of Tess in view, one must say that Hardy highlights the significance of coincidences, as he repeatedly forces us to see no logic in the unfolding events.

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