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### EPIPHANIC REVELATION OF REALITY IN THOMAS HARDY'S TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

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#### ABSTRACT

This inquiry is designed to investigate the impact of epiphany in broadening, deepening and sharpening human understanding. The study focuses on Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by analyzing how epiphany worked as a psychological flash of insight to shape out the understanding and actions of its protagonist Angel Clare. The interpretation of the text in the backdrop of theoretical understanding of epiphany reveals that the novel imbibes epiphanic revelation of reality. The protagonist of the novel experiences epiphany which culminates in his realization about the truth of things. Epiphany plays a vital role in his character; it not only deepens and sharpens his understanding but also shapes out his further course of action. He receives a psychological flash of insight that transforms his understanding about the reality. There is an unexpected alteration in his perception of life; what seems to him impure or immoral is no more immoral.

#### INTRODUCTION

Man is a unique creation of Allah Almighty having bestowed diverse faculties. Human life is not a static phenomenon rather it is on the basis of ever evolution. Human actions constantly evolve as new movements emerge to speak to the concerns of human being. Since literature is chiefly concerned with human life and novel is a genre of literature providing a wider canvas to a novelist for attempting at different aspects/facets of human life. A novelist is free to give full went to his/her imaginations and to explore human life from different perspectives. Therefore, novelists sometimes consciously or sometimes unconsciously depict human life from outside (social) as well as from inside (psychological) through dissecting human's passions and emotions. This study

seeks to investigate epiphany, as a moment of self-realization or psychological flash of insight that changes our outlook about ourselves and about prevailing conventions and directs our course of action. It plays crucial role in human's understanding about the essence of things and shaping their behaviors/actions. Epiphany is a term having two connotations. In its prehistoric connotation epiphany means a Christian feast celebrating the manifestation of the divine nature of Jesus to the Gentiles as represented by Magi (Kelly 2014, p. 79). While according to the second connotation, an epiphany is an awakening, arrival at an understanding, a rebirth, and a renewal. It can take a variety of forms. It is a sudden manifestation of the essence or meaning of something or a comprehension or perception of reality by means of a sudden intuitive realization. It can also take a form of spiritual flash that would change the way we viewed ourselves and the other human beings.

Epiphany is a sudden and abrupt manifestation of the reality; in a novel it is associated with one particular character. Therefore, in the present study, researchers aim to examine the impact of epiphany on the hero of the novel; how epiphany broadens his understanding and how it shapes out his action.

Human psychology has been a flash point for the writers in the modern era. Writers have tried to explore human psychology with its vast and variegated nature. In the present era, there is a great need to understand and contribute to the studies of psychology as it is directly related to human nature.

The study has been conducted to find out the nature of positive transformation of human understanding that is sudden and accurate, as defined by the term epiphany, in Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. This research will hopefully contribute to the existing body of epiphanic literature. It will provide readers a new insight into human psychology and will also help the readers to look at any literary work with a new psychological perspective. It will also encourage the researchers to conduct more researches to find out Epiphany in different works and contribute to literature through their creative thoughts.

The word epiphany has its etymological origin with religion. It has been associated with Christian's celebration of twelfth night – twelve days after Christmas. The Encyclopedia of religion provides detailed explanation of the term epiphany in the following manner; “the Christian feasts of the manifestation of Jesus Christ. According to Eliade (1987) or western Christians the feast is called ‘Epiphania’ or ‘manifestation’, while for eastern Christians it is known as ‘Theophaneia’ or ‘manifestation of God’. Over time the epiphany holy day has evolved into a celebration of the feast of the three miracles, comprising the visit of the Magi, the baptism of Christ and the miracle of transforming water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana” (McDonald 2008, p.117). The term epiphany is defined in the Webster's New International Dictionary as; “(a) a Christian feast celebrating on 6<sup>th</sup> January and still in the eastern church commemorating the Baptism of Christ and secondarily the marriage feasts at Cana but since 5<sup>th</sup> century in the western church commemorating the coming of the Magi as the occasion of the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. (b) A sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of

something, an intuitive grasp of reality through something usually simple and striking” (Webster’s 2000, p. 764).

An epiphany is rooted in Greek word ‘epiphania’ which means manifestation. It can be described as a moment of self-realization or discovery that enlightens a person’s perception of reality or understanding of the things. It has been used in modern philosophy, psychology and fiction as the manifestation of self-truth. Often in philosophy, an epiphany is described as not just a self-realization, but enlightenment about a mental perplexity that relates to people in general. Philosophers may get rare flashes of insight that seems to give the moments of deeper understanding; they feel, into very complex problems. Such a rush of understanding may provoke great joy, but then an epiphany may later be dismissed as too simple. Many literary artists have used the concept of epiphany to great effect by dissecting the minds of their characters and revealing the essential understanding they reach at the end. James Joyce is one of the prominent writers to use this concept to secular experience. He used it to suggest a revelation at the time of perceiving a commonplace object. In Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* every short story revolves around the central character experiencing epiphanic revelation of the sorts.

Psychologists recommend two broad areas about the nature of change pertinent to human mind, the developmental changes that occur over the life span (from birth to death) and more precise changes that are carried out through counseling and psychotherapy. Developmental change refers to “any qualitative (changes in process and function) and quantitative (changes in height, weight and intelligence) modification in the structure and functioning of human beings. This are of psychological functioning falls within the domain of ‘developmental psychology’, which focuses on maturational changes across the life span” (Lerner 2002, p.34).

Epiphanies on the other hand are sudden and abrupt insights and/or changes in perspective that transform the individual’s concept of self and identity, usually because of the creation of new meaning in the individual’s life. Epiphanies are momentary experiences of transcendence that are enduring and distinct from other types of developmental changes and transformation. However, only three studies have specifically developed and tested a concept of epiphany. The first of these was carried out by Jarvis (1997) who defined epiphanies as a “sudden discontinuous change, leading to profound, positive and enduring transformation through a reconfiguration of an individual’s most deeply held beliefs about self and world” (p.133). The second study was carried out by Miller and C’de Baca (1993; 2001) who developed their own conceptualization of epiphanies which they termed as ‘quantum change’. Quantum change is defined as “a vivid, surprising, benevolent and enduring personal transformation” (Miller and C’de Baca 2001, p.4). The third study was carried out by Matthew G. McDonald (2005) who defined epiphanies as “an existential philosophical and psychological inquiry” (p. 13).

Denzin (1990) defines epiphanies as interactional moments that leave a mark on people’s lives and have the potential to create transformational experiences for the person (p. 69). Essentially epiphany is existential crisis that occurs in

those problematic interactional situations where the participant confronts and experiences a crisis — the effect may be both positive and/or negative. Through epiphanies, personal character is manifested and made apparent; it modifies fundamental meaning structures in a person's life. They are catalyst for perceptions of new identity. Such experiences, according to Denzin, always entail hurting emotions and their meaning is always given retrospectively, they are relived and re-experienced in the stories persons tell about what has happened to them (p.71).

Denzin names four different types of epiphanies based on their functions; 'the major', 'the cumulative', 'the minor or illuminative', and 'the relived'.

In the major' epiphany, an experience shatters a person's life and makes it never the same again... the 'cumulative' epiphany occurs as the result of a series of events that have built up in the person's life... in the minor or 'illuminative' epiphany, underlying tensions and problems in a situation or relationship are revealed... in the 'relived' epiphany, a person relives or goes through again, a major turning point in his or her life. (p.17)

In the field of literary studies, the term epiphany is commonly referred to in the lives and works of various novelists – (Nicholas 1987, Johnson 1992, Beja 1993, Bidney 1997, Coen 2000) – attempted ascertain the idea of epiphanies in the modern novel particularly on the literary works of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Woolf and William Faulkner. Through their writings the four authors used a range of terms to describe sudden, insightful and transformational experiences. For instance, James Joyce used the term 'epiphany', Thomas Woolf used the phrase 'moment of intensity or illumination', William Faulkner a 'flash' and Virginia Woolf 'matches struck in the dark'. The following passage, taken from Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, provides an example of how her phrase, 'matches struck in the dark', was used to convey her character's struggle with the meaning of life and its partial resolution through illuminating and revelatory.

Like a work of art', she repeated, looking down from her canvas to the drawing-room steps and back again... And, resting, looking from one to the other vaguely, the old question which traversed the sky of the soul perpetually, the vast, the general question which was apt to particularize itself at such moments as these... stood over her, paused over her, darkened over her. What is the meaning of life? That was all – a simple question; one that ended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come... Instead, there were little daily miracles, illuminations match struck in the dark... Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together... Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent... this was the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing was struck into stability. (p. 175-176)

From this wide range examination of literary epiphanies, Beja (1993) developed his own definition: "I would call it a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether from some object scene, event or memorable phase of the mind — the manifestation being out of proportion to the significance or strictly logical relevance of whatever produces it" (p.18).

Hayman (1998) also examined the use of the term epiphany in the works of James Joyce, as expressed in Joyce's protagonist Stephen Dedalus. Hayman's analysis of Dedalus strengthens the argument that epiphanies were frequently experienced by the novelists. Epiphanies were important in the imaginative and spiritual growth of these authors, that the conception or ideas like it were used to create and develop characterization in their literary works. Their examples illustrate how epiphanies provide coherence, unity, shape and meaning out of the seeming chaos and meaninglessness of life (p.644).

For the purpose of this study, an operational definition has been developed on the basis of previous definitions in order to serve as theoretical framework. Epiphany is a philosophical and psychological flash of insight that changes our outlook about ourselves and about other human beings and deepens our understanding about the prevailing conventions and finally transforms our course of action. This study imbibes analytical mode of inquiry and qualitative content analysis technique has been applied to interpret data. The contents of the novel are analyzed/interpreted paragraph wise with particular focus on the main characters, in the backdrop of operational definition of epiphany. The study focuses on the protagonist of the novel Angel Clare. The society, human psychology and the prevalent conventions about morality are analyzed to comprehend protagonist's mental entanglement and further self-realization.

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* has been regarded as masterpiece. It describes the life of a beautiful girl named Tess, who is loved by a man whom she hates and who is deserted by a man whom she loves with her soul. This novel is a revolt against what is called the conventional morality. It is based on Hardy's theory that chastity does not consist in physical or bodily purity, it implies the purity of heart, and there is something spiritual about it. The novel proceeds with all well but suddenly takes a turn when John Durbeyfield – Tess' father – knows from a person that he is descended from the noble D'Urbervilles family. He begins to dream of high things. His wife and he decide to send Tess to a rich lady of D'Urbervilles clan with the hope to get good job in her poultry form. But unluckily she meets the lady's son Alec D'Urbervilles who seduces her and makes her pregnant. She returns home unhappy. After some time she gives to a child (sorrow). She has to face endless miseries on account of it. Her child dies and she works as a dairy maid in the Talbothay form. Here she meets Angel Clare – son of a clergyman – and falls in love with him. They decide to marry. Before the marriage is performed, Tess writes a letter to Angel informing him about her past life. But somehow, he does not get that letter because it goes under the carpet of his room. After their marriage Angel tells her his secret and asks her if she had any. When she tells him about her past life especially the tragic incident of seduction, he deserts her. Now again she has to face difficulties, her father is dead and her poverty compels her to surrender herself to a villain whom she does not like. She longs to see Angel who returns too late. When she sees Angel, she murders Alec and runs away with Angel. The following morning, she is arrested and sentenced to death. In this way her miseries come to an end and a pure woman pays her debt to the social code. Angel Clare is portrayed by Hardy as character belonging to middle class society who apparently does not agree with middle class ways. He is shown as a man that assumes himself as open minded and thoughtful but in reality, he is

not, he suffers from faults and flaws like any person belonging to that era. He is first introduced in chapter two when he refuses to dance with girls against the wish of his brothers, "I am inclined to go and have a fling with them. Why not all of us? It will not detain us long" (p.73). This suggests his rebellious nature. He is against the ideals and morals of prevalent society. His next appearance is in Talbothays where Tess works after the death of her baby and loss of her innocence. Angel falls in love with Tess despite of his proposed engagement by his parents. Angel also rebels against his parents' wish to attend Cambridge and become a minister like his father, "I shall do without Cambridge then" (p.85). His rebellion against his parents compels readers to think of him as a man not like his family or the middle-class gentry.

At Talbothays Angel is loved by two ladies Izz and Retty but he loves Tess and proposes her. Tess hesitates to accept his proposal considering her tumultuous past and tells Angel that Izz and Retty also love him expecting that he will turn his attention to them but Angel says, "they are pretty girls, yes; but not better than you" (p. 171). When second time Angel proposes Tess, she refuses again which makes him curious about her that she has a secret regarding her past. She is quite young but she has a melancholic outlook towards life. After persistent refusal from Tess, he tells her that he will leave Talbothays, "it is a fortnight since I spoke and this won't do any longer. You must tell me what you mean, or I shall have to leave this house" (p.83). This is very strange on the part of Angel giving ultimatum rather than talking to her like a thoughtful man as he thinks himself to be.

After his marriage with Tess, Angel reveals his past and asks her if she has any secret from the past. When Tess discloses her seduction by Alec, there is a change in the character of Angel Clare. He does not accept Tess with this impurity which was the result of a tragic incident and deserts her, "you are good. But it strikes me that there is a want of harmony between your present mood of self-sacrifice and your past mood of self-preservation" (p. 174). He blames her for lagging in morals. This shows that he is a man entangled in societal values and norms related to morality. He presumes himself as free thinker but actually he is more like a part of patriarchal society. After his separation from Tess, he moves to Brazil where he has time to think about his love for Tess. He thinks that he was harsh on her. He develops a soft corner for her and realizes that she was pure by her mind, purity of mind is more important than the bodily purity. Angel Clare has been presented as a free-thinker, and he also thinks of himself as totally unconventional character. However, when Tess tells him that she was raped by a man — his reaction is in line with conventional Victorian thinking about women and society. He is not just condemning her for having sex before marriage; his reaction is more philosophical, it is hard for him to accept that she is not an ideal, ethereal, perfect woman.

"[. ..]. Angel! — Angel! I was a child when it happened! I knew nothing of men.

'You were more sinned against than sinning,' that I admit.'

Then will you not forgive me?

I do forgive you. But forgiveness is not all. And love rue?

To this question he did not answer

'O Angel — my mother says that it sometimes happens so! — She knows several cases where they were worse than I and the husband has not minded it much — has forgiven her at least. And yet the woman has not loved him as I do you!'

Don't, Tess; don't argue. Different societies, different manners. You are an unapprehending peasant woman, who have never been initiated into the proportions of social things. You don't know what you say" (p. 232).

Angel Clare does not desert Tess because of her impurity or her loss of virginity but because of social conventions. He felt himself entangled so much in the social conventions about morality and sexuality that he could not accept Tess as a pure or moral woman, although she beseeches him and pleads for her purity. But what makes Angel change his mind? When he goes to Brazil, he begins re-think his inherited ideas about morality and sexuality.

"[...]. having long discredited the old system of mysticism, he now began to discredit the old appraisements of morality. He thought they wanted re-adjusting. Who was the moral man? Still more perplexedly, who was the moral woman? The beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements but in its aims and impulses its true history lay, not among things done, but among things willed. How, then, about Tess?" (p. 340)

Therefore, according to this new principle — 'a woman's moral worth is measurable not by any one deed, but by the whole aim and tendency of her life and nature' — Tess did not seem to him vicious.

[...] Viewing her in these lights, a regret for his hasty judgment began to oppress him. Did he reject her eternally, or did he not? He could no longer say that he would always reject her, and not to say that was in spirit to accept her now (p. 340)

Tess embodies both the physical and the spiritual, but for a long time, Angel was not able to see past the physical because of the pressure of conventional concept of morality. There is a sudden change in his outlook towards life. He receives philosophical and psychological insight into the essence of reality, which transforms his perception, how he viewed himself and others. Earlier Tess was impure to him but now she not only appears to be chaste and pure but also his ideal. He starts thinking of Tess and the words of Izz Huet strike in his mind;

"[. . .]. Tess would lay down her life for him (Angel), and she (Izz) herself could do no more" (p. 341).

It is epiphany, which brings him around this realization that Tess is pure woman and could still be his ideal.

"[. . .]. Thus, from being her critic he grew to her advocate". (p. 341)

So, he undergoes an epiphanic experience, which results in his philosophical and psychological flash of insight that changes his outlook how he viewed himself and others and finally directs his course of action. Through this epiphany Angel comes to the realization of truth, it sharpens and deepens his understanding about morality and finally his course of action or his behavior is totally changed.

## CONCLUSION

This study was carried out to ascertain whether Thomas Hardy has incorporated epiphany in his novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The major objective of the study was; has Thomas Hardy succeeded in displaying epiphany in the novel and how epiphany is important for the understanding of human being and finally the role of epiphany in shaping human actions. The research questions were formulated to achieve the devised research objectives. The subject area of the study was epiphany which was explained on the basis of available data and operational definition of epiphany was developed for the study. The novel was analyzed paragraph wise by applying qualitative content analysis with particular focus on the protagonist of the novel.

The analysis of the data justifies that novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* displays epiphany. The protagonist of the novel Angel Clare undergoes epiphany which culminates in his realization about the truth of things. Epiphany plays a vital role in his character; it not only deepens and sharpens his understanding but also shapes out his further course of action. He receives a psychological flash of insight that transforms his understanding about the reality. There is a sudden change in his outlook towards life, what seems to him impure or immoral is no more immoral.

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