

Hard Times as a Reflection of Victorian Society

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Abstract

The present paper aims to show that *Hard Times* depicts the reality of social prejudice in Britain during the Victorian era. In *Hard Times*, Dickens provides a vision into the Victorian world. Since the novel written when European Industrialization was at its pinnacle it is studied here how education system, utilitarian philosophy became futile having no human concern. In conclusion society and individual's role has been firmly contemplated. He takes on the role of a social critic, criticizes the industrial revolution in England and reveals among the most vital issues of the time the modernization of human beings, social discrimination, extinction of fancy as a significance of industrialization, and the unfair position of women. *Hard Times* reflects how English people and society suffered poverty, harassment, and injustice of the industrial era. Dickens clearly stated his hate towards the divorce law which remains a pleasure of the rich people. In novel the hard worker are simply named as "Hands" with no feeling, which shows that they are included uniquely as far as work, creation and assembling. Except that they are not human beings. The novel is an important criticism against the economic disparity of the age where the rich are extremely rich and the poor have abject poverty, they can't even have a square meal. All the system is against the blue-collar workers. The 'Hands' were constantly stifled by law, workers union and their employers. The

novel is an excessive example of “attack on the utilitarian’ of the Victorian era, where emotions and feelings were not counted but only the working efficiency, facts, number and calculations were given more importance. The facts have substituted the love and feelings.

Keywords: Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, Social Discriminations, Victorian Era.

Introduction

Victorian period refers to the rule of the Queen Victoria (1837-1901). Queen Victoria was the first English monarch to see her name given to the period of her reign while living. Historians differentiate Victorian era into Early Victorian (1830-48), Mid-Victorian 19 (1848-70), and Late Victorian (1870-1907). Under Queen Victoria, Britain transformed by the Industrial Revolution became the world’s chief territory. The Victorian Age was portrayed by fast change in numerous circles like in clinical, logical and innovative information, and furthermore changes in populace development and setting.

The Victorian Age was a period of prosperity in the English history. Invention and modification were its main features, which largely contributed to the change in the construction of English society. The transformation from a horticultural to a modern culture prompted extreme changes in the way of life and the acknowledgment of the Victorians. Development in fields such as technology and science, along with new philosophies and a shift in the religious sphere, causes a formation of a worldview that ultimately turns everything upside down. Interestingly Englishmen have the chance to improve both themselves and their environmental factors through these new creations. Nevertheless, the changes reflected themselves positively as well as negatively on each aspect of daily life. At first glance, the revolution appears idyllic since much is simplified and somewhat easier. However, in spite of bringing numerous advantages, this modernization has a dark side underneath the surface. The whole thing being industrialized, the world turns into a cold place and its people into nothing more than a labor force.

Characteristics of Victorian era:

- **Power:** England became the world's most influential and richest country by ruling a quarter of the world's population. Likewise, the demand for goods like food, clothes, and housing increased significantly as a consequence of the increase in population from 16 million to 37 million.
- **Industrialization:** A number of factories spread up leading to massive developments in the living as well as working standards of the people. This also resulted in the advent of various townships. Railways were built which swapped the traditional horse-drawn carriages as a mode of transport. Aside from this, a great deal of scientific creations occurred like the phone, the radio, rail routes; sewing machines and so on were imagined.
- **Morality:** People were slowly losing the free meaning of literature and that is why during this time novel as well as prose was the prevalent forms. We read the fun and sentiment of Dickens, the societal miniatures of Thackeray, or the psychological studies of George Eliot, we find in almost every case a certain purpose to sweep away error and to disclose the underlying truth of human life. Immorality of mortality starts during this period.
- **Revolt:** The human revolution theory was proved by Darwin at this time. Thus, now God was not one of the means to create fear among the people. So, there was a kind of struggle between religion and science.
- **The new education:** The Victorians started up with the possibility that all children should go to class, and they checked to ensure the schools were up to score as well. They were the main individuals to find out if it was more right than wrong to allow children to work.

- Status of women: Ideal woman's life revolved around the domestic sphere of her family and the home. They were not given any rights. They were expected to marry and become the servant of her husband. Higher education was considered wasted on women. Finally, the Great Britain was also hit by the evil prostitution. Because of the economic hardships suffered, women started getting into this business.

The Victorian era characteristics are beautifully and aptly portrayed by the various writers of Victorian era like Tennyson, Charles Dickens and many more. One of the most significant writers of this era was Charles Dickens. Charles Dickens is known as the most popular English novelist, and the highest of the Victorian period. In his literature Dickens casts, a light on many issues rising from the Victorian Era. Clearly, he views the literature as an armament in the fight against world's wrong-doings. The idea of the novel reflecting reality is well presented in his literary work, mainly in his novels *Hard Times*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Christmas Carol* and *Bleak House*.

Hard Times is a novel written by Dickens, published in 1854; it is viewed as a product of Victorian time. *Hard Times* is divided into three separate books, the principal book is "Planting" and the subsequent book is "Harvesting". The two books demonstrate the theological concept of "whatsoever a man sowed, that shall he also reap". The third book entitled "Garnering". *Hard Times* is one of Dicken's social critiques which propose abundant social developments and ideas, and it depicts his philosophy on values, where all men are equal. Dicken's major principle was that a better workplace creates better working conditions; thus, lives of the workers will be better. It also includes a language of satire through the use of humour and travesty to criticize socialism, industrialization, and urbanization. *Hard Times* was regarded by critics as an authentic work; since the great part of its occasions hold real factors, disregarding its creative and inventive side.

Hard Times means a period of economic depression with food shortage, low income and unemployment. *Hard Times* means an overall situation in which the lives of people are limited. In such state, people cannot have a free and impulsive growth of their natural feelings and sentiments. It shows a situation in the novel, where automation and industrialism lead to slavery to routine and calculation.

In '*Hard Times*', Dicken's has occupied a unique space. He speaks of so many issues such as education, relationship between factory workers and owners, parents-children relationship and so on. To unearth cruelties of Victorian urban society he used irony and wit very finely. Classroom, the town-coketown, manufacturing plant mechanical territory, Circus Company and its environment and more over design are the fine illustration of knowing the society where in the novel is set.

Coketown – a City of Fact (setting)

The setting of the novel is another main thing to be noticed. In all regards it is manufacturing plant ridden metropolitan town. The novel takes place in Coketown, a mill town; that is separated between the industrialists on the one side and, working class men on the other side. Working class community especially factory workers are known as "hands." They are never considered as human being having heart and soul like anybody else. They are just like machines acting as the directions of their masters (owners)

Coketown is the fictional town and is the most striking example of its ruthless reign. It is portrayed as a city of Fact, a city whose inhabitants are monotonous products of a cold, materialistic world. The streets are empty, covered with ashes and dark smoke: "It was a town of apparatus and tall chimney stacks, out of which relentless snakes of smoke followed them for ever and ever (Dickens). The inhabitants are required to cast away their emotional state. There is no room for love, enjoyment or imagination, whatsoever: "Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial"

(Dickens). Everything revolves around manufacture and material things. Dickens' Coketown represents the 19th Century England circumstance, when industrialization, the nation turns into a position of distance and the people essentially an instrument in the undertaking of acquiring material riches.

Social Inequality – Class Division

Hard Times mirrors the evanescence of mortality in the Victorian Age. People are not judged according to their personality, but rather by the number of their possessions. All over the novel, Dickens places in the center the most obvious example of injustice concerning the Victorian Age, inequality in the social structure. Industrialization causes the rise of class division, whereby through the painstaking work of the poor, the rich are becoming richer, and the poor keep getting poorer in an attempt to stay alive. Dickens puts an importance on the living situation of the lower class, aiming to spread awareness within people in terms of injustice surrounding them. On the one hand, Dickens places the capitalists, the moral monsters with their comfortable overgenerous lives, who are familiar by their careless tea drinking. Dickens clearly symbolizes this idea in his two avarice and reason driven gentleman, Mr. Bounderby and Mr. Gradgrind: "that they never understood what they needed; that they lived upon the best, and purchased new margarine; and demanded Mocha coffee, and dismissed everything except prime pieces of meat, but were endlessly disappointed and unmanageable" (Dickens). In the eyes of these men, people are simply objects, whose only function is labor. Knowing of no better than hard work, the working class serves as a mirror reflecting the 19th Century England situation. More over the best delegate of the oppressed is no other than the personality of Stephen Blackpool. Blackpool is the Dickens' Symbol for the Oppressed. Years of factory work, make it pretty difficult for this man to find any pleasure in life. As if the non-ending work in the factory is not sufficient, when he comes home, he has to handle his alcoholic wife. Here again the anxious living

conditions of the laborers come to the fore, since it appears that the only way to escape reality is to drink yourself into unconsciousness (Dickens). Stephen communicates his longing for a separation, to encounter delight at any rate as far as adoration, his solicitation is dismissed. On the other hand, Mr. Bounderby, as a delegate of the privileged, has a full option to end a marriage whenever he needs. Once again, the hypocrisy of the rich is generally conspicuous.

"Fancy" vs. "Fact"

The opposition between "fancy" and "fact" is demonstrated from the earliest pages of the novel. Clearly, Mr. Gradgrind School opposes fancy, creative literature and "wondering." Instead, they encourage the search of "hard fact" and statistics through scientific investigation and logical deduction. Yet, the Gradgrinds are so pitiless and careful in their schooling that they figure out how to execute the spirits of their understudies. Sissy Jupe and the individuals from Sleary's circus organization remain as a differentiation, contending that "individuals should be interested." Life can't be solely committed to work.

Education

There is a strong case made in *Hard Times* that education is not simply the classroom experience of remembering facts. The novel shows the view that having an emotional component to our education is crucial. It is also shown in the novel that this kind of learning can happen at any time in life. Learning about the way other people live is the groundwork for appreciating them as fellow creatures; learning about them only in terms of their productivity is a recipe for class warfare. If this proper groundwork is not laid, then a corrupt kind of learning can take its place, full of sarcasm and pessimism.

The Position of Women

Dickens advances the issue of the women's position during the industrialization period and in *Hard Times* we can clearly see his concern with their situation. In order to reveal the lifestyle of women and their rights in a male-dominated world, such as it was the

Victorian age, he presents three main female characters, Louisa, Sissy and Rachael, whose fates happen to be so identical, and yet so diverse.

- Louisa: Dickens's first character is a member of the ruling, wealthy social stratum of Coketown. Confused by her cold-hearted education, Louisa feels disengaged from her feelings and estranged from others. While she unclearly recognizes that her father's system of teaching has deprived her childhood of all joy, Louisa cannot actively appeal her emotions or connect with others. In this manner, she married Bounderby to satisfy her father, despite the fact that she doesn't adore her better half. Through her character, the conventional job of ladies comes best to the front.
- Sissy: Dickens's second female character exemplifies all that is good in human nature. Sissy Jupe, symbolically a member of the circus, owns indeed the ability to bring joy into other people's lives. Unlike Louisa, Sissy spent her entire life enclosed by fancy. This emotional freedom, she is brought up upon is the reason behind her inability to fit in the world of facts and reason. Due to her compassion, in the eyes of the capitalists, she is only a number. With her character, Dickens gives as an example of a woman as she should be during the Victorian age. Her possession of free will makes her unique. Introducing her character into the novel, he breaks the monotony of Coketown and its people.
- Rachael: Dickens's third female character is a poor woman, missing everything in life except for a big heart and a beautiful soul. Rachael is a part of a 'race', located lowest on the social tree. This is why she is not considered even to be a woman, but rather a part of the factory. Rachael is the real proof of how material things are meaningless in a person's life when it comes to being a decent human being. Apart from her humanity, the goodness of her nature is visible in her faith. Despite her hard life she never rejects God, but rather inspires others to follow the basic values of Christianity.

No one is perfect, so learn to forgive and forget. Dickens uses this character not only to provide an example to all the women out there but to all men. (Jönsson)

It can be said that Dickens all over the novel has tried at his best in sighting cruel, two-faced, and inhuman face and materialistic attitude of the Victorian urban society. It may be said in Wordsworthian terms saying that the world is too much with it (that Victorian urban society) and for them, accomplishment and spending are much more important than understanding human relations. The society and the people wherein living are concerned with commodities and morally deprived of will soon be ethically degraded. Life without which has no meaning.

Literature Review

- A research paper entitled “Utilitarianism in *Hard Times*: An Educational Perspective” by Zubair Ahmad Bhat says that Victorian society at his time was more towards the logic of mind and was far away from the sentiments of heart.
- A research paper entitled “The Influence of the Victorian Society on Dickens’s *Hard Times*” by Ivana Josipović says that He takes on the role of a social commentator, criticizes the industrialization of England and reveals among the most urgent issues of the time the mechanization of human beings, social inequality, extinction of fancy as a consequence of industrialization, and the unjust position of women.
- A research paper entitled “A Critical Study of Charles Dickens' Representation of the Socially Disadvantaged” by Pamela Makati says that although the Industrial Revolution fostered urban growth, it is unfortunate that the number of the poor also increased. Many of them lived under squalid conditions with poor sanitation leading to fatal diseases and even death. Being a socially conscious writer, Dickens depicts the world in which he lives, as a strategy to raise awareness in his readers of what was really happening, and hopefully, to bring social reforms.

- A research paper entitled “A Social Study of Poverty in Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times*” by Yazdan Bakhsh Gholami says that the theme of poverty remains one of the central problems that Charles Dickens focuses and attempts to draw attention of his readers to. The problem of poverty becomes a serious social and economic burden of English society of the late 19th century.
- A research paper entitled “The Conditions of England as Reflected by Dickens' Social Novel” by Mashair Mohammed JumaaOshi says that Nineteenth century England was the high noon of the social realist novels. The leading Victorian writers like Dickens, George Eliot, Benjamin Disraeli and Elizabeth Gaskell attempted to represent and diagnose the social problems of England in their works.
- A research paper entitled “Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times*: A Social Document” by Dr. Sandeep Kumar Sharma says that Dickens emphasized the importance of reality in his novels by having sympathy for the poor and helpless labourers who were also neglected and suffering lot, all this added an appeal to the novel.
- A research paper entitled “Children in Dickens’s Novels” by Dr. Anindita Dutta says that Child labour was not new, but as industrialization continued it became more visible, as masses of ragged, stunted children crowded the city streets.
- A research paper entitled “Victorian Age, Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy” by Chiara Pucci says that The Victorians were great moralisers. They promoted a code of values based on personal duty, hard work, optimism, respectability, conformity to social standards and charity. These values were of equal application to all the classes of society, but were given their essential Victorian form by the upper or middle classes. The idea of respectability distinguished the middle from the lower class. Respectability was a mixture of morality, hypocrisy and conformity to social standards.

- A research paper entitled “Ecocritical Analysis of Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times*” by Joshi Akash Nayan says that Dickens has used *Hard Times* as a store room of social conscience. The novel contains a bitter diagnosis of the condition of England. The Industrial Revolution didn't only pollute the environment, but also the minds, morality, and values of people.

Conclusion:

The rise of the industrial age brought many changes in English society. Although scientific progress brought about numerous advantages, it also brought many disadvantages. Charles Dickens uses fiction to indicate the numerous social and economic issues derived from it and criticizes social and economic prejudice. His novel *Hard Times* calls for an awakening of the 19th-Century Englishmen. As a social critic, Dickens speaks out of problems brought to light with major industrial progress, such as bad position of women and the chase for money which results in social difference. Just because machines can contribute to the rise of the economy, people should not allow them to govern their lives. Dickens urges his fellowmen to unite forces and provide confrontation in the fight against machinery. In *Hard Times*, he proves that imagination and affection are important in the preservation of our humanity since the children had to thoroughly study the Facts, while they were born as emotional creatures. Thus, it is the Combination of the brain and feelings, which constitutes us as human beings and the absence of either one results in a failure of our true nature (H.R).

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