



The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on Society in Charles Dickens' Hard Times

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Abstract— *The industrial revolution during the eighteenth century had many favorable outcomes. Through the Victorian era, there was rapid progress due to industrialization. This divided society into the rich and the poor. Charles Dickens's novel "Hard Times" is considered one of the early works that had a critical perspective on the effects of the industrial revolution on working life. This paper analyses Dickens's opinion on the events that were witnessed during the Industrial Revolution. Though he criticizes the sudden changes due to industrialization, he was not against the industrial revolution. It can be seen that his concern for the people made him reach out to bring about the necessary changes in the lives of the factory workers. The goal of the research is to understand how industrialization affected society from the writer's perspective.*

Keywords— *Charles Dickens, The industrial revolution, social changes, and perspectives.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Charles Dickens points out the effect of industrialization on society and the working poor in his novel "Hard Times." It was published in 1854, during the Industrial Revolution. Reading literary texts retains information about social life experiences and historical events more vividly in the mind than reading history texts. The novel addresses the social problems with which Dickens was concerned for the poor and working classes in England during the revolution. He wanted everyone to know the bad condition of the people working in the factories. The development due to mechanization transformed agrarian societies into industrialized urban ones. With more production of goods, there were rapid economic and social changes. It was an important period of technological innovations and inventions, for example, the steam engine, coke and steel production, cotton yarn spinning machines, etc. The initial period of industrialization was harsh on society as it changed the traditional lifestyle to a more capitalist one. In his 'Hard Times', Charles Dickens gives a picture of the negative effects and the condition of life in the industrial cities of England.

II. HARD TIMES AS A SEPARATE NOVEL

Hard Times is a social protest novel divided into three books: sowing, reaping, and garnering. It is about the miserable condition of factory workers in Britain and the failing system of education. The nineteenth century saw continuous changes in every field. The novel deals with the state of the nation due to industrialization. Dickens feared that progress might make people like machines. He intended to create awareness. He wanted to bring about better communication to find solutions to the problems arising from the industrial revolution.

Dickens' *Hard Times* were possibly written to reform the education system during the period of the industrial revolution. The novel begins in a classroom where the students are being taught by Mr. Gradgrind. The schools taught only facts, which deprived the children of being creative. Imagination and fancy were not allowed. The philosophy of utilitarianism taught that since human nature was motivated by self-interest, it was needed to educate and support individuals to pursue their interests. The characterization in the novel makes it clear to the readers what Dickens thinks about the system. Dickens felt that if

children were educated only with facts and reality, they would also become like machines without any emotions. Gradgrind's insistence on teaching mere facts in school and life in the industrial town will create a society without love and human compassion. People become arrogant and selfish, devoid of sympathy and concern. The materialistic Josiah Bounderby shows these traits as he believes that everything can be acquired with money. Dickens has reflected on the exhausting and deadly working environment, the poor laws, the struggles of workers, and life in the industrial cities. The novel makes the reader understand the various problems that occurred socially and individually due to the industrial revolution.

III. INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

When the Industrial Revolution began in 1837, various problems arose due to the irregular and quick development of industries. Industrialization benefited mostly the upper class and did not offer any benefits to other classes. Though it was productive, it created disgraceful living conditions due to overcrowding as a consequence of the population shifting from rural areas to urban.

Novels by many writers, including Victorian-era Charles Dickens, who criticized the social structure were considered novels of social reform. *Hard Times* is based on the observations of Dickens while he visited the carpet factory, cotton factory, and woolen factory (Brantlinger, 1971). The novel is different because it shows a complete vision of contemporary society. Dickens's Coketown is like the entire industrial Revolution in one town. That is why it is dominated by industries and factories. His attack on the factory system is clear in his writings. He visited the poorest streets to understand the effects of the industrial revolution on social life, as he had concern for the working class. His first impression on visiting the factories was hostile because of the dangerous working conditions Dickens started writing "Hard Times" after he viewed the strike and lock-out in Preston. His observations of industrialism after his visits are reflected in the lines "It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves forever and ever and never got uncoiled. "The engine worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness." (Dickens, 1954) Dickens observed that the people in the industrial cities were affected badly by air pollution. The "Great Smog" affected the whole of London, causing a vast number of deaths. Dickens compares the industrialized city to a factory, with its workers having similar daily lives. The society represents the family, and the physical structure of the factory is a metaphor for the disastrous forces that work in

the lives of the characters. Coketown's monotony is well described in the lines "It contained several large streets, all very much like one another... and every year the counterpart of the last and next" (Dickens, 1954).

The portrayal of the present conditions was to bring about the needed changes in the living conditions of the people. He was not against the industrial revolution but was only stressing the requirement for the betterment of the present. Throughout 'Hard Times', he suggests that the factory owners should not follow laissez-faire but abide by the laws which insist on the education of factory children and protect the workers from dangerous machines and smoke that is harmful to health.

IV. EFFECTS OF MECHANIZATION

Mechanization has brought about major changes in the lives of people. There was a rapid evolution of labor-saving inventions like the spinning jenny and other electricity-driven appliances during the eighteenth century. A major change from hand-made goods to factory goods left many people jobless. Machines were considered more efficient as they produced the same every day. Dickens opines that though efficiency is good, a rational system also means no creativity or recreation. People get coiled up in the system as everything is the same every day. The advent of the power loom created unemployment, and the surplus labor caused a reduction in wages. Everyone in a family had to work in coal mines, woolen mills, or cotton mills to meet their needs. Children were abused. Many of the workers in the fabric mills were sick with tuberculosis. The factories were just barn-like structures without ventilation. Many other changes accelerated the industrial revolution. Automobiles and fuel-powered vehicles made transportation easy. Changes in infrastructure and manufacturing transformed society. The dominant sources of power became industry and trade. In *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens observes that industrialization can turn a man into a machine, as they tend to become objects without emotions.

He feels that a nation without fancy, romance, and entertainment cannot become great. He mentions that imagination is necessary for people to develop a spirit of mercy and gentleness. He suggests that if humans are allowed to become like machines without any creativity and compassion, life will become miserable. The mechanizing effects are compared to the Gradgrind children in the fifth chapter. Without pleasure, a monotonous, uniformed existence can result in mechanical life. The characters Thomas Gradgrind, Tom Gradgrind, Cecilia Jupe, and Louisa Gradgrind portray the social phenomenon of "fact only philosophy" negatively. Thomas

Gradgrind raises his children according to the philosophy of self-interest, rationalism, and only facts. He tries to apply utilitarianism and forces it on everybody. In this philosophy, everything has to be explained with facts and logic, and there is no place for imagination. Engaging in other activities was seen as a shameful thing. They were filled with information that would be helpful for their future as well as that of the industrial revolution. When Gradgrind sees his children peeping at the circus, he goes mad, as anything abstract or creative was considered a waste of time. As the children grow older, they become self-interested pleasure seekers. Louisa and Tom Gradgrind appear to be having problems in their lives as they were taught only the philosophy of utilitarianism. A conflict between the capitalists and the workers is accounted for in the text. The ruling class of society will force their ideas on the working class. People are used as cheap labor to make their profits in business. Therefore, people in the Victorian age led a monotonous life and eventually became mechanical in their behavior too.

Therefore, what is implied is that children should be allowed to engage in imaginative and creative activities, otherwise they will also be like machines. The philosophy of fact is shown to be the main problem of the poor. Factory machines and clouds of black smog are all associated with facts. The factory owners and the workers had poor relationships, which are portrayed often in the novel. Stephens's case, as he falls into an old hell shaft, shows an example of an unfortunate relationship, as the mine owners did not consider closing abandoned pits. He has mentioned that the trade union does not satisfy the demands for fewer working hours, more benefits, and better wages for the working people. Strikes or other worker organizations were not a peaceful and practical solution to the oppressed working class's problems. The fear of violence, as in Preston lock-outs, gives rise to conflicting feelings toward workers who are involved in riots.

V. THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION'S IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Four socially different families are represented in the novel. The revolution has negative effects on families as they tend to suffer in various ways. It has made relationships cold and uncomfortable within the family. Lack of imagination can result in unnatural and problematic family relations. This is shown with the Gradgrind family. The rise of capitalism and labor unions has changed traditional family life. More importance is given to authority and power. A family with money is respected. (Oshima, 2015) Gradgrind's family is an

example of being a victim of the industrial revolution. He believed that only facts could lead to a comfortable life, but unfortunately, his family suffered. (Abuzahra and Imraish) He is seen to be more geared towards earning money and authority.

He does not consider anything other than the reality, which makes him tell Louisa often to "never wonder". He wanted to be a member of parliament as he believed that a high social position was possible only with a good scientific framework. The creativity of people was neglected as it was considered a failure. Like machines, they were made to learn, analyze facts, and memorize. The rigid relationship between the father and children and the atmosphere at home was suffocating. Tom was unable to apply what he learned, and his need for money made him rob Bounderby's bank. Gradgrind was interested in approaching people with money and also controlling others. This behavior negatively affected his relationship with Louisa, his daughter. With the arrival of capitalism in England, the status of women was also lowered. The notion of capitalism was established by Adam Smith. He put forth that trade and the economy would increase if the environment was liberal without the interference of the government. This resulted in the exploitation of labor and poor working conditions in the factories. (Mutlu). In the story, Ms. Gradgrind does not have any power to take decisions and is supposed to behave and speak in a programmed way. She can only convey her husband's ideas to the children and does not have any significant role in bringing up her children. Along with Gradgrind's family, Stephen's family also feels the bad effects of the industrial revolution. In the story, Mr. Bounderby represents the capitalist. He only wanted people who could produce and always despised the working class. The character gives a clear understanding of how the capitalists lived during the period of the industrial revolution.

He calls the workers the hands that will help him earn more money. He sees people as machines and does not show any respect for them. They were made to work for very long hours. Does this create any sociological problems? Most of them worked six days a week for 10 to 14 hours a day without any holidays or paid vacation. The physical and mental effort make it stressful for the families. Stephens's family has no time for recreation as most of their time is spent working. (Abuzahara & Imraish, 2017) His wife, unable to withstand the pressure, changes from a lovable, pretty wife to an alcoholic. The loving family changes into one full of hatred and dejection. The love and passion in families are destroyed because of the strenuous working conditions. The revolution created an imbalance and did not care for the comfort and well-being of the workers. Even in families of the higher class,

warm emotions were replaced with cold ones and relationships were built on money and prestige. The owners never cared if people of the lower class lost their jobs and struggled.

Dickens makes the readers understand that money or power should not be allowed to have any effect on relationships in families. The circus performers were not affected by the revolution as they loved and cared for each other. They could understand that the revolution destroyed unity and relationships in families. Their happiness was in imagination, passion, and love. The family of Sissy is an example, as she was brought up in a different environment away from facts and figures. She does not give in to Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy as she prefers to be with her own beliefs. A balanced life, according to Dickens, is to consider the heart and the mind.

Sissy could change the melancholic atmosphere in Gradgrind's family. Sowing, reaping, and gleaning reflect how families live. Whatever is sown in our minds will be reaped, and at last, what is left will be garnered. The novel provides insight into social problems in order to raise awareness in order to correct and improve the conditions that will harm society in the future. Ignoring emotions and morals can result in inhumane relations. Human values and principles cannot be left behind as they can turn men into machines. He argues that poor people should be living in better conditions than they are. He is concerned about the education system and feels that it should be corrected. Children should attend schools and not be made to work in factories. He wants people to be creative, as imagination helps people to be empathetic towards others.

Though the writers wrote about human degradation, the improvement of conditions happened only by the initiative of the workers. They learned that destruction or riots are not the solution. They organized trade unions and, slowly, they began to help themselves. The legalization of trade unions in 1864 and the election of workingmen to parliament were the results of the recognition of the rights of workers. "Hard times" shows the greed of industrial society and the misuse of the utilitarian philosophy. From his experiences, Dickens got the inspiration to write the novel. He fears that the mechanical behavior of a person can harm the family and, in the end, result in a monotonous society wherein people become less bothered about the welfare of others. He puts forth clearly that the process of mental mechanization begins with the school system, as it has only facts and nothing else to develop creativity and imagination in children.

VI. CONCLUSION

Dickens's work is among the first to reflect the impacts of the Industrial Revolution on society. New inventions brought about a transformation in production, resulting in the factory system. The rise of the factory system was criticized because machines dominated and the work efforts of the people were not valued. Along with mechanization.

Charles Dickens has revealed his observations of the period during the industrial revolution in his novel. The era ruled by utilitarianism followed the philosophy that everything should be based only on facts and reality. Creativity and imagination were replaced by mechanization. The characterization in the novel is a comparison of two philosophies, and at the end, it is made to understand that fancy and facts are both important for a person. The cruel impact of the industrial revolution changed society. People became detached as they followed the utilitarian philosophy. Toward the end, Dickens makes it clear that family is important and all other things are to be secondary.

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