



A Marxist Analysis on Charles Dickens' Hard Times - A Victorian Novel

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The Hard Times by Charles Dickens is the subject of this paper. This research attempts to put the Marxist theory's Elements into effect by using the Victorian book Hard Times by Charles Dickens as the subject of study. It seeks to use the novel's elements of the theory as a medium to demonstrate the detrimental effects of wealth distribution inequality. The paper examines the novel from a Marxist perspective as a critique of societal inequality. In order to highlight Dickens' ideology through the social context and characters of his book, it introduces the reader to class consciousness and class struggle as components of Marxist theory.

Key words: Marxism, Social Division, Class Struggle, Class Consciousness, False Consciousness, Charles Dickens, Hard Times, Victorian Era.

The biggest social problem of the Victorian era in England in the 19th century was the diversity of social strata and the inequalities between them. Since the French Revolution took place during this century, many aspects of social life have changed as a result of this movement. In other words, the revolution led to the industrial age taking control of people's lives. Lower-class laborers suffered terrible exploitation at the cruel hands of the wealthy. These employees carried on living in the factories like automatons or machines. They lacked social equality and were denied the freedom to live on their own.

Additionally, even children at this time had to work to survive. As a result, British society at the time was burdened socially and financially.

Charles Dickens, a well-known Victorian author, witnessed these issues, challenges, and social disparities and in his book Hard Times, he vividly captures the realities of this era. Dickens encountered poverty as a kid and as an adult; he observed oppressed people's lives in several nations where he traveled. As a result, his book depicts the oppressed people who struggle to survive in desolate

industrial towns with a wealth and misery divide between the rich and the poor. Rich people's repression in both the social and economic spheres is evidence of a capitalist system.

Dickens uses the Marxist idea of initiating a revolution against all of these situations to try and illustrate how to get rid of these awful circumstances. He believed that in order to prevent industrial global rulers from eradicating individuality, lower-class people should be aware of the inequality they experience in society, particularly laborers. In other words, it's essential that the employees understand the true worth of their freedom and labor. This study's major goal is to demonstrate how the novel Hard Times incorporates these Marxist viewpoints and expressions. To do this, the characters' opinions, actions, speech, and utterances are examined, and the Marxist features are attempted to be demonstrated using the literature study approach.

"A system of economic, social, and political philosophy based on ideas that view social change in items of economic factor," according to sources, is Marxism. (Mirunalini & Devi, 2017, 13). Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' economic, political, and social theories are embodied in the social theory known as marxism. Its foundations include class strife, social movements, and labor. Marxists think that in order to put an end to the conflicts, a society without classes should be created. The most important component of Marxist theory is class conflict, which develops among workers because they sell their labor to employers. This conflict is so significant because it highlights the prejudice based on class that prevents society from progressing. Marxists believe that this persecution will spark a workers' uprising in favor of the creation of a society with no classes. The opposite of capitalism is marxism. According to Marx, Man is so estranged from his labor that it is carried out in accordance with a labor-dividend structure that is determined by the market. The primary aspect of Marxism is when



the means of production are owned by the public. Under capitalism, the proletariat and working class are the exclusive owners of their labor power. They simply have the right to reveal their work.. *Hard Times* is a tightly plotted book that differs from Dickens' usual style in that it uses fewer words, incidents, and characters. It also demonstrates Dickens's belief that children need wonder in their lives, such as fairy tales and pretend play, and that hard-working people need leisure activities to occupy their free time and distract them from the monotony and stress of their jobs. This put Dickens up against Sabbatarians and temperance (anti-alcohol) militants. In addition, the critique criticized both sides of the industrialist bosses and organized labor's corruption battle and the unfair system that restricted divorce to the wealthy.

My research aims to analyze the Marxist notions mentioned in Charles Dickens's novel, *Hard Times*.

Charles Dickens, who was born in 1812, is a well-known writer from the 19th century, which is known as the Victorian era. He produced writing in all literary subgenres. He was also the "most cherished and unique novelist." Since he vividly captures nineteenth-century English society in his works, he is regarded as a realist. His novels are among the best-known works in England because of his brilliant storytelling ability.

Charles was inspired by his personal experiences to write on the destructive effects of industrialism and the ensuing class conflict. The author wants his readers to comprehend the masters' inhumanity to the workers and to feel the exploitation caused by the employers given that he tells what this class witnessed at the hands of cruel masters. His earliest memories of the Industrial Revolution had an impact on his creative writing. Many of his literary pieces were inspired by his memories of the blacking industry from his childhood, which is where he had to labor. Furthermore, "Charles lived alone and worked in the blacking warehouse for months during which time it was traumatic, and the intense sense of injury and abandonment Dickens felt deeply influenced his fiction".

His travels to many nations, including the United States and Canada, followed by visits to towns like Manchester, have helped him to comprehend and empathize with the plight of slaves and laborers. His writing of various social classes was influenced by these travels. Dickens "used a realistic and naturalistic style of writing to expose the harsh

reality of industrialization." Dickens "sympathized with the plight of the poor, and through his writing as he sought to bring awareness to Victorian society of the injustice and harsh conditions of living experienced by the poor," despite the fact that he was a middle-class member of the community. His best-known books therefore show that the lower classes were denied participation in society in nineteenth-century England and that the impoverished were subjected to the harsh realities of the industrial age. Dickens spoke and read from his writings all over From 1858 until his death, he traveled to both England and the US. 1870 saw his demise. "He was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world," Thomas Carlyle, one of his friends, remarked about him. Queen Victoria's reign is referred to as the "Victorian era". Britain underwent transformation during this queen's reign as a result of the Industrial Revolution, and she ascended to become the most powerful country in the world. Queen's "character and moral standards gave the era a prudish reputation while restoring the prestige of the British Monarch." The writings of Dickens, which were the outcomes from this time period demonstrate how both Victorian society and Britain developed.

Rapid developments, i.e., scientific and technological advancements in every region of the nation, had a negative impact on the society of the time. There were three classes at the time. The three social classes were the Church and aristocracy, the middle class, and the working class. The lower class was made up of the working class and the poor. The families were upset since there were three different social strata due to economic factors. "In the Victorian era, the working class comprised the majority of the population. The working environment was poor. At that time, everyone was required to labor, even the children. The proprietors of factories and natural resources were referred to as the upper class. They used laborers, and they were in charge of the governmental system at the time. Small farmers and merchants were referred to as being in the middle class. This population's influence has grown thanks to the advancement of businessmen and factory owners. They were therefore "the poor people who were poor in the past and became powerful and self-made men later". The Victorian era's tremendous advances in science and technology unavoidably had an impact on the literature of the day. In the Victorian era, the novel also emerged as the dominant literary genre. These pieces mostly addressed the social issues and actual



circumstances of Victorian-era daily life. The lives of people who were split into three groups were the subject of the writings of this era. They demonstrated the actual struggles of poverty. The effects of the Industrial Revolution were clearly depicted in their works. Since there was a clear social class divide at the time, the majority of Victorian literature focused on this topic and the challenging lives of the lower classes.

According to Marx, a class is determined by how its members relate to the means of production. Marx believed that employees should receive the minimum wage in order to support their families. The capitalist system is to blame for this. The fact that the workers have no control over their labor or the final product they produce causes them to behave like slaves and to feel alienated. Marx argues that a proletarian or socialist revolution is necessary as a result. The misery of the proletariat under the capitalist class might therefore be considered as the cause of this uprising. Even their religious convictions are lost. Additionally, the bourgeois class is against working class freedom. Marxists sympathize with the proletariat and working class. They believe that workers' conditions are the same everywhere. Thus, their viewpoint is shared by all. They believed that in order to avoid encountering a class uprising, there should be class consciousness or knowledge. The means of production, the social structure, and the dominant ideologies are all under the authority of the ruling class. Exploitation is a component of capitalism and free markets, according to Marx. The difference between the value of the product created by the worker and the actual wage that the worker receives is the profit realized by the capitalist. In other words, employers underpay employees compared to the true value of their labor. Because of this, the employees get more isolated over time. Workers in capitalist systems sell their labor but do not own the producing means. When the wages of the workers are compared to the output, they are insufficient. The tools of production are owned by the bourgeois. So they take advantage of the proletariat. diverse classes have diverse lives and even different educational systems in capitalist economies. The position of people started to alter with the advent of industrialism, as capitalists started to govern the workers. Then, the capitalists began to disregard the skills and capacities of the workers. However, the value of the workers is greatly influenced by the products they generated. People should value and appreciate the labor of the workers because they put in such a lot of effort and endure such challenging

situations. The desire of the working class to improve their lot in life often sparks a revolution as a result of their opposition to capitalist oppression. In other words, ongoing conflict leads to uprisings "where the proletarian class will win and non-class society will spread." Additionally, "class consciousness, sacrifice, revolution, social antithesis, and social injustice" are included as Marxist concepts.

The changes in many aspects of life in Britain after the Industrial Revolution had an impact on the literature. According to Marxist philosophy, the writer's society will be mirrored in his or her writings. He or she mostly exhibits social and economic advancement. Additionally, these authors show how the social class gap is a serious problem. The portrayal of socioeconomic disputes between the capitalist and working classes is another area they "focus on." According to them, the capitalist system robs people of their humanity.

Marxist aspects can be found in *Hard Times* (1854), a book by Charles Dickens. It also covers the consequences of the 1840s Industrial Revolution. There are disparities between classes and class conflicts. People start to feel alienated when they start living like machines or robots. *Hard Times* opens with a wealthy trader named Thomas Gradgrind's life philosophy in the English industrial city of Coketown.

Now, I'm looking for facts. Teach just the facts to these young people. In life, facts alone are desired. Plant nothing else, and remove all other vegetation. Facts are the only thing that can be used to mold reasoning animals' minds; anything else will never be helpful. This is the guiding concept I use to raise both my own children and the ones I am raising now. Keep it factual, sir! (Dickens, 1854, 1)

As was said previously, Mr. Gradgrind, one of the main characters, dedicates his life to rationalism, self-interest, and fact. He wants teachers to solely impart life facts to students in the classroom. Following this mindset, he never allows his two oldest children, Louisa and Tom, to show an interest in fantastical or imaginative things. Mr. Gradgrind thinks that only logical laws can control human nature. In the book, he stands in for the industrial revolution's and the bourgeoisie's spirit. He handles people like tools. After Sissy Jupe's father vanishes, he locates a school and enrolls her. Though facts are the most essential thing in the world, he still wants to raise this girl with his opinions.



I am a Donkey, that's what I am, Tom muttered, twirling his hair in a variety of sulky ways. I have the same stubbornness as one, am more foolish than one, enjoy the same things as one, and would like to kick like one.

One of Gradgrind's oldest kids is shown here. Tom claims that because he ought to ignore his emotions and base his decisions solely on the facts, he resembles a donkey. His background dictates that he acts like an animal. Only the truths are taught to his children, and their father makes it clear that they should not wonder. Mr. Gradgrind desires for his children to be models who are similar to one another. Nevertheless, his parenting style turns his kids into automatons rather than helping them. Gradgrind marries his daughter Louisa to his wealthy buddy Bounderby because he doesn't want his kids to act in accordance with their emotions. He claims that getting married is a sensible decision. His disregard for Louisa's feelings is evident. The kind of life Mr. Gradgrind gives results in a mismatched marriage.

I suppose it was capable of inflammation, and I was born with inflammation of the lungs and of everything else," Mr. Bounderby replied. I was among the most depressed little wretches you had seen in a long time, ma'am. I was so sick that I was sobbing and groaning nonstop. You wouldn't have been able to touch me with a set of tongs since I was so filthy and ragged.

Another significant character, Josiah Bounderby, tells Gradgrinds about his early years in the passage above. He claims that he was born destitute and wretched, much like his parents were. His grandma took care of him after his mother left him when he was a baby. However, he was unable to endure her treatments and fled. Mr. Bounderby boastfully asserts that he is a self-made man while recounting his life experiences in an effort to suggest this. He has achieved success in Coketown. He is the proprietor of a manufacturing business and a bank. He has overcome the poverty of his upbringing to succeed as a banker and manufacturing owner in Coketown. In addition to being affluent, he is also strong. His social mobility serves as an example of social mobility in England in the nineteenth century. The social hierarchy used to be determined by birth or bloodline in England. However, in a capitalist, industrialized society, power is based on wealth. Bounderby's drive helps him escape poverty and become a prosperous bank and factory owner.

Josiah Bounderby is less concerned with truth and more concerned with power and money. He believes that his willpower and discipline have given him his strength.

The lowest-paid employees in Coketown's factories are referred to in the book as "Hands." Stephen Blackpool's hand is on one of the hands. He serves at Mr. Bounderby's factory. He struggles to reconcile his love for Rachael, a fellow factory worker. Since Blackpool is already married to a drunk lady who goes missing for months, he is unable to wed her. Bounderby is asked by Stephen if he can get a divorce. But it's not at all for you. It is expensive. It is really expensive. Blackpool discovers that only affluent males are able to do this, as can be seen. Stephen Blackpool is a kind and caring individual. He leads a meager life.

Oh my friends, the underprivileged Coketown workers! Oh, my friends and fellow citizens, we are the serfs of a brutal and oppressive tyrant! Oh, my dear friends and fellow victims, workers, and gentlemen! The time has come, I tell you, for us to unite as one powerful force and crush the oppressors who have for too long waged war against the robbery of our families, the labor of our hands, the endurance of our muscles, the noble rights that God bestowed upon humanity, and the unalienable rights and privileges of brotherhood!

In the aforementioned journey, Slackbridge, one of the workers, tries to set up a union for a strike in the factory. He wants his pals to understand how horrible their situation is. He believes that the powerful exploit them. He believed that they ought to be paid for their labor. They are treated like machines, and a strike is required to stop this inhumane labor. They feel alienated because they have no control over the labor or products they produce. Stephen, however, chooses not to participate since he thinks that a union strike will only increase hostilities between companies and employees. The strained relationships between the rich and the poor are evident in a current labor conflict. The workers want to end the oppression of the upper classes, and a class battle is starting. Similar to what Marxists believe, the persecution of the working class results in a workers' uprising and the creation of a classless society.

Analyzing *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens reveals that Marxist ideas and aspects are incorporated into this literary masterpiece. People in the narrative are only permitted to conduct themselves in accordance



with a few rules for capitalist and bourgeois employers. The lower classes aren't permitted to feel or think, according to the ruling classes. They consequently act like machines or robots as a result of these principles. Capitalists pay less attention to workers than the true value of their labor. The employees tend to feel alienated over time. The proletariat sells its labor force but lacks the necessary production tools. When the wages of the employees are compared to the output of their labor, they are insufficient. Employers take advantage of the working class as a result. The employees want others to contribute.

During the Hard Times, the positions and circumstances of people began to change with the onset of industrialism. There are growing class tensions. The capitalists began to rule the employees while ignoring their abilities and qualifications. Therefore, the workers want to strike in order to stop the oppression of capitalist employers. These kinds of Marxist issues might be examined in reference to Dickens' fictionalized world and Karl Marx's social philosophy. Hard Times perfectly encapsulates the class consciousness, selflessness, and social injustice of the Victorian age. By doing this, Dickens effectively conveys the socioeconomic realities of this time. His book gave voice to the oppressed, especially the workers, who at last saw they needed to act more like humans than machines. The novel's characters came to the conclusion that they needed to rise up against the bourgeois to accomplish their aim.

Additionally, Dickens expresses his viewpoint on the morals that apply to everyone equally. He also critiques the industrialized world in sarcastic terms. He criticizes this reality while inspiring readers to believe that both social and economic systems will undergo a revolution. At the book's conclusion, the members of the lower classes understand this obligation. In conclusion, Dickens is considered as being against the persecution of the underprivileged and employees by the powerful or their masters in the novel Hard Times. This conflict is reflected in the novel's Marxist viewpoints embraced by the author.

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