



Plights Of Proletariat & Social Realities In Charles Dickens' A Tale Of Two Cities

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Abstract

This article endeavours to examine the social realities and the plight and predicament of proletariat through Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. This novel that covers the history of England and France from 1757 to 1793. It speaks about the rise of French Revolution. Emotions expressed and practiced by the rich and the powerful is very narrow, limited and not even practical when compared to the hard work of the working class. Dickens portrays the life of the helpless proletariats in the hands of the Aristocrats. Different social and economic positions trigger opposed interests between people of different classes. Dickens' highlights the effects of inequality of wealth and power during the Victorian Age.

Keywords: Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities, Marxism, Bourgeois Vs Proletariat.

1. Introduction

Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* is a novel that covers the history of England and France from 1757 to 1793. It speaks about the rise of French revolution. The social reality of England and France is well pictured. The division of labour leads to the development of class distinction. The story is about the issues of liberation from social tensions, oppressions by the capitalist and as a result, the class struggle in the society. Through the eye of Marxism and Charles Dickens portrays the struggle between the bourgeois and the proletariats in the society. Lifestyle of the aristocrats do not compel them to struggle in life for their daily basic needs. Whereas the working class find life impossible due to the high tax and low wages. The power enforced on them by the rich, make them struggle and thereby they begin to revolt. It is a revolution that can do any good in their lives. The people in the power had an upper hand and never failed to oppress the poor who remain helpless due to their weak social background. Lifestyle of the two classes are completely different. Charles Dickens never fails to bring out the pain and agony of the oppressed.

Emotions expressed and practiced by the rich and the powerful is very narrow, limited and even not practical when compared to the hard work of the working class. The life of the rich becomes unworthy of praise. Whereas the daily life of the poor is blended with a variety of feelings that has to be appreciated from dimension viewed. As a result, the life of the poor needs much description and detail for good

understanding. The famous lines of Charles Dickens “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times” (ATTC) offers a Marxist view of the bloody events and social realities of the eighteenth century England and France.

Need for liberation of social strains, the evils of capitalism and means by which the Bourgeois keep the proletariat oppressed is felt throughout the entire novel. Dickens exposes the harsh reality of the lower classes dehumanization. Dickens uses the term ‘superior class’ in order to define only their richness and not their nobility. On the other hand every action of the working class stand an example of their mental stability and compassion. It is not only the wealth that differentiates their class but also their way of life and exhibition of thoughts. As a result, the society starts splitting up into two great hostile camps. Marquis Evermonde, a member of the upper class by running his carriage over a little boy feels that compensation by currency can make things neutral. The life of the poor has become so mean for the rich. Liberation through revolution is needed to fight against this evil. Marx would advice feels that the poor should not go content by receiving the mean compensation by the rich. Dickens describes the man as “handsomely dressed, haughty in manner.....A face with transparent paleness one set of expression on it”. (Dickens).

Evermonde is just a collection and representation of the upper-class feelings. In spite of the exhibition of the evil thoughts, the noble Evermonde hands another vulgar phrase to this incident. ‘It is better for the poor little boy to die, than to live’. It clearly speaks about the absence of humanity and empty value added to materialism. Charles Darnay’s conversation with Marquis Evermonde clearly dramatises the mean thinking of the high born. Evermonde’s hatred towards his nephew not only reveals the atrocity of his nature but also the ruthless move of the French upper class on its dependants. Darnay realises the evil of his uncle and regrets for being a member of that upper class. Along with the elites there are characters like Dr. Manette, Charles Darnay’s father-in-law, who once a doctor is now a shoe maker. He is a representative of the poor working class where fate has made him suffer for eighteen years imprisonment in France and thereby got separated from his loving daughter who thinks that her father is dead and no more. His imprisonment is a failure of the Governing system and as a result he ends up in complete loss of self. He busies himself in shoe making in order to regain his lost identity.

A shift from human to machine is very clear. The economic environment has compelled Dr. Manette to become a shoe maker. It is against this dehumanizing aspect, any working class should revolt. The Aristocrats would love to suck the blood of the poor and find no guilt in their action. Marx wanted the oppressed to revolt and find a solution for all their sufferings. Dickens’ lines clearly picture the life of the helpless proletariats in the hands of the aristocrats. Dr. Manette says “we were so robbed by that man who stands there, as all we common dogs are by those superior beings. – taxed by him without mercy, obliged to grind our corn at his ..,..... I had never before seen the sense of being oppressed”. (ATTC) Even women were raped by Evermonde which is another kind of social injustice. Inevitable revolution is the only solution to bring about any justice in the life of the peasants. As Darnay is against the social norms of the elite, he is continuously imprisoned and insulted. Michael Foucault would say that the jails are epitomes of oppression and a place for rulers to deprive the weak. The ugliness of jails is a clear picture of the oppression by the aristocrats and the rulers.

Since the court falls in the hands of the wealthy people like Darnay are punished repeatedly. These are the evils faced by the proletariats. The relationship of the prisoner and the authority is as that of the relationship between the ruling class and the proletariat. Judgement would always favour the rich, and the poor had to suffer imprisonment. It is mere revolution that can put an end for such an oppression. Karl Marx wanted this to happen which in turn would benefit the proletariat. People who find seats in the high rank of society, dominate the people who fail to attain such a position in life. The wine shop run by Madame Defarge and her husband represents the evils of capitalism. Even Madame Defarge becomes oppressed by Evermonde and turns a tool in the hands of the police in order to capture the revolutionaries.

The officials in the court where Darnay is executed to death, represent the elite who believe that their system alone can save the society and do good for the public. Though Madame Defarge rebels

against the capitalistic evils, she could not succeed at the end. Whereas she is trapped by the oppressed group. These capitalists dwell deep into the society and victimize the poor peasants and kill their feelings and thereby keep them as their life long slaves. It is against this evil, Marx raised his voice.

Sydney Carton is a character someone different within the limits of the Bourgeois society. He frees himself from the dominant circle by his way of thinking. Carton possesses the aim and desires to make a change which basically should be in the heart of every suppressed class. His execution is only an exhibition of the evils practiced by the Aristocrats. Carton's willingness to behead is the message of the French revolution. He ensures the safety of the other characters like Darnay, his wife Lucy and Dr. Manette. Carton does not flow along the class where he originated. He can be viewed as an individual who is oppressed within his class – being the lawyer whom no one trusts, working for an influential law firm that regards him as an individual who accomplishes the 'dirty' work. His martyr action is due to deprived state and not his will.

He completely reflects the working class. His public execution only encourages the rebellions to fight and it would never suppress the feelings of the revolutionaries. Using power to destroy the masses reveals the suppression of the weak class by the superior class. Execution is a non-sensical action by the upper class to suppress the proletariat. The bloody French Revolution exhibits the atrocious nature of the upper class during the Eighteenth-century England and France. The characters of the novel belonging to the two main classes – the Bourgeois and the working class are caught in a whirlpool of historical and social proceedings that dehumanize and destroy their essence of life. For characters like Evermonde, society is just a commodity rather than values. The social turbulence is a direct result of the revolutionaries' rebellion. The feelings of the individuals are quite economic and social.

2. Conclusion

Throughout the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, justice was denied for the poor. During the time of revolution death was the only punishment to suppress the working class. It shows how the nature of justice could take ugly forms. It can be to avenge a family member, like in the case of Madame Defarge, or it could be to settle the scores regarding something said or done. This proves that justice has changed along with time and the people in power. Revolution which can bring about change in a society is the only remedy for the poor to have a better life. This revolution should be done at the needed hour without making any compensation and form a government or office by the proletariat.

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