

**MISERABLE PLIGHT OF CHILDHOOD IN DICKENS' GREAT EXPECTATIONS AND HARD TIMES****Dr. Neha Dhull**Asstt. Professor, Vaish Arya Kanya Mahavidyalala  
Bahadurgarh (Jhajjar)

**Abstract:** - In the present paper efforts are being made to have a comparative analysis of the kind of exploitation in *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations*. The children are exploited by the parents themselves and the society as well. The early novels of Dickens expose the miserable plight of children in society. *David Copperfield* and the *Great Expectations* recount what Dickens himself experienced in his childhood. They are the most autobiographical of his novels. Even his later novels include children in the main cast. No other novelist has created so many children, in so many ways, so variously and so well.

**Keywords:**- exploitation, autobiographical.

**Introduction**

With an autobiographical touch, Charles Dickens tries to throw light on the evils prevailing in the society. Among the painful events of his early life his apprenticeship with the Warren's blackening factory at the age of twelve was as dark as a black hole in the sky: "Those days of humiliation let unforgettable scars on his mind. From that time dated his pity for children and his conviction, a true one which he held very strongly that nobody can suffer as a child suffers."<sup>1</sup>

Unlike David in *David Copperfield*, Pip the main protagonist of *Great Expectations* is at least sentimental. Like other novels of Dickens the novel highlights the theme of maltreatment. Pip, suffers numerous indignities quite early in age like them he is an orphan and thus isolated from familial ties and security. Pip is a boy "brought up by hands"<sup>2</sup> and called 'swine' and 'pig' by the elders. He has no privilege of schooling other than that of attending Mr. Wopsle's great aunt's school in the evening. Pip is reared harshly by a masculine sister who constantly let him know that her pride results from the community's awareness that she bothers to rear him at all. Apprenticed to a village blacksmith and his sister's husband Pip has no better prospects than those of a blacksmith.

Thus isolated from family, community, clearly defined future and anything on which pride could be based, he very early associates himself with death experience in the

churchyard where his parents and five brothers lie buried. So the character of Pip is a more objective study of Dickens's own growth of life, and there is no disagreement anywhere between his nature and circumstances. As a matter of fact parental love has been declared by Dickens as the most powerful expression of feeling of attachment and all the children in the novels of Dickens are deprived of this parental love.

Like *Great Expectations*, *Hard Times* also is with the theme of ill-treatment with children. A major part of the novel exposes the wrong education system. The children in the novel are exploited at schools, and a little later by the money minded industrialists. In *Hard Times*, Dickens exalts instinct above reason and intuition of heart above positive knowledge. The novel fully manifests the most -tragic limit to which intellect and emotions may entangle throughout long Christian tradition. The dominance of reason, intellect and wit in eighteenth century minimized the effective side in this clash and the utilitarianism of early nineteenth century went back even further in to something unreal.

All the children of Gradgrind are products of the Gradgrindian system raised in 'Stone Lodge', taught in the school of hard facts. This system of education only revealed the futility of the utilitarian philosophy. Although educated in the school of facts Tom descends into debt and bank robbery while Louisa elopes with Harthouse. So, it is the defeat of the idealism that was fostered

through their education.

Dickens exposes the collapse of educational system in *Hard Times*. Most of the schools and school masters in Dickens' novels are bad schools and bad school masters, representing one kind of cruelty or the other. Dickens' concern for education is closely allied to his concern of preventing crime and social unrest in the country,

"It is not cold blooded cruelty but block headed ignorance against which Dickens had to fight over the whole ground of education ... he knew that the vices of society could for the most part be traced to these bad beginnings. He taught his readers to think much of children at the time when England had special need of an educational awakening."<sup>3</sup>

A vast multitude of children in the novels of Dickens are only casually mentioned. Many of them are drawn with enough of individuality. They are specimen of spoilt and delinquent children, who without proper care and education take to a wrong path for which the society is largely to blame. Tom, Bitzar, Louisa and Sissy, in *Hard Times*, are the victims of a wrong system of education. In these cases Dickens demonstrates utter disregard of child's urges and instincts or premature over-education leads to no better.

Dickens' children are therefore not the gay children playing in an ideal, natural atmosphere. Most of his child characters are maltreated, subject to sarcasm, bad temper and restrictive conviction of parents, employers and teachers. Pip and Tom are among those children, who have not been allowed the childhood happiness; naughtiness and innocence.

In the light of these observations a comparative study shows that in *Hard Times*, Dickens criticizes the whole educational system and in *Great Expectations* the education and the society as a whole. The study of both these novel is made to have a clear idea of the kind of exploitation in both the novels. In *Great expectations* as the novel opens Pip is discovered wandering alone in the marshes. His views regarding his parents, brothers and sisters are summed up in the following way with a stream of consciousness

technique through the mind of Pip:

"As I never saw my father or my mother and never saw any likeness of either of them, my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from ... gave up trying to get a living exceeding early in that universal struggle."<sup>4</sup>

The above passage gives us the details of the emotional pain felt by Pip in his early childhood. He was a lonely and desolate child and one day,

"The lonely boy becomes, aware of his desolation on the dark marshes in the midst of a hostile universe, standing by the graves of his mother, father and brothers, aware that he will be beaten by his foster mother when he returns home."<sup>5</sup>

From the very beginning Pip used to live with his sister. She was a hard and vicious woman and she did not show any sign of love for Pip. Pip had always been an unhappy child at home because of the ill-treatment of his sister. Moreover Pip's first fearsome experience is his meeting with an escaped criminal Magwitch. He compelled Pip to bring food and a file for him by saying that, "I will have your heart and liver out"<sup>6</sup> As a result Pip had to bring the required material. Fortunately he was not detected by anyone but he became restless. He reveals his that, "In a world, I was too cowardly to do what I knew to be right, as I had been too cowardly to avoid what I knew to be wrong."<sup>7</sup>

Pip's experience in the school was also not good. He was sent to Mr. Wopsle's evening school. Mr. Wopsle read aloud in a terrific way. He used of beat the boys without any reason. On other hand usually the children were taught by Mrs. Wopsle, who was one of such women who were good for nothing. She was not a degree holder. Moreover, she slept through each lesson. She remained busy in running a little general shop during the day. In this connection, Donovan points out that, "Dome schools were worse, if possible than those run by men. No degree of competence was expected from female teachers. The list of qualifications for mistresses in the old charity schools specially excluded that part which relates to writing a good hand and

understanding of Arithmetic.”<sup>8</sup>

In comparison to *Great Expectations* the educational system revealed in *Hard Times* was equally harsh. The two plots of the novel centre round Mr. Gradgrind and Stephen Blackpool. Mr. Gradgrind is the central character in the novel whose educational system was also useless. Tom and Louisa are the products of Gradgrindian educational system which is based primarily on facts, figures and statistics. These children are raised in the house aptly called, “stone Lodge” which is also founded on hard facts:

“A great square house with a heavy portico darkening the principal windows, as its master's heavy brows overshadowed his eyes. A calculated, cast up, balanced and proved house. Six windows on this side six on that side; a total of twelve in this wing; a total of twelve in the other wing; four-and-twenty carried over to the back wings. A lawn and garden and ... everything that heart could desire.”<sup>9</sup>

Grandgrind compelled his children to be brought up according to his educational philosophy. In his philosophy of education there was no place for sentiments. In act it repressed human feelings most convincingly. All the time he endeavoured to show that the conflict between reasons on the one hand and the affection and imagination on the other. He was,

“A man of realities, a man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over.”(p.4)

Regarding the development of Pip's personality in *Great Expectations* mentions must be made of Miss. Havisham. She was an immensely rich and grim lady. One day Pip's sister brings the news that the boy is invited to play at the house of Miss. Havisham. The child has to submit to this care. He has no other way out but to “submit to the complete dehumanization which society or his step parents' practice upon him.”<sup>10</sup>

In this novel we are told that Miss. Havisham's heart was broken and she wished diversion and for this selfish motive she adopted Estella

at the age of three and wanted to make her a heart breaker. Pip suited her and the child was used by Miss. Havisham at the cost of his dreams and feelings.

Miss Havisham took advantage of Pip's ignorance of the source of his expectations. She used him both as an object on whom Estella might practise her cruel charms and as a way of antagonizing her greedy relatives. Pip was frequently “tortured by the disdain of her adopted child Estella for his coarse hands, clumsy boots, and common speech.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus Miss Havisham used small children for her personal motives. She adopted Estella at the age of three, who was a beautiful heiress in her youth, but had literally been left at the altar by a young man who had quoted her only to borrow money.

In this way Pip and Estella were used by Miss. Havisham for her selfish motives. Being a rich lady she tried to spoil the life of Pip and Estella. In the same way in *Hard Times* Tom and Louisa led the same kind of life due to the wrong kind of education during their childhood. The psychological development of Louisa and Tom, who are to carry the main burden of the consequences of evil, is fully convincing.

Louisa's emotional life has no outlet except her affection for her brother Tom. The only way she looks to turn her adult life to any advantage is to use it to prompt her brother's interest. Certainly her father's philosophy and his way of having brought her up have proved of no help to her. Louisa, Tom and Sissy are three children who suffer due to the emotionless philosophy of Mr. Gradgrind and Bounderby.

The novel tells us that Mr. Gradgrind wanted to bring his children according to his hard philosophy of facts. When we meet Louisa she is a girl of fifteen or sixteen. Her father does not want to develop the imagination and emotions of his children. Louisa remains unhappy in her house because all kinds of restrictions are imposed upon her and Tom by her father. None of Gradgrind's children is allowed to wander, yet she;

“Often sit wondering here, and think how unfortunate it is for me that I can't reconcile

you home better than I am able to so. I don't know what other girls know. I can't play to you, or sing to you. I can't talk to you as to lighten your mind, for I never see any amusing sights, or read any amusing books that it would be a pleasure or a relief to you to talk about when you are tired," (p.50)

Regarding the adulthood of Pip in *Great expectations* and *Tom and Louisa* in *Hard Times* we come to know that they were tortured by the world of adults in their childhood. To have a close view of these children we have to peep in to their adolescence. In *Great expectations* Pip was exploited by Estella, at Miss Havisham's House. He was rebuked for his poverty by Estella. But one day Pip was offered an opportunity to go to England and he accepted. He thought that it was the kindness of Estella and Miss. Havisham. Even the hatred behaviour of Pumblechook was changed.

It was the first time when Pumblechook fed Pip by saying him as his good friend. Dickens rightly presents Pip "as a junior play boy."<sup>12</sup> Pip did not know that the people only loved his money. He was obsessed with the newly acquired status. Even he was filled with snobbery because now he even did not like Joe. He always wanted to keep him away.

This change in fortune turned him into a snob. Associating Jaggers with Miss. Havisham he imagined that, "she was fantastically determined to make him her heir and dreams that she destitutes him to marry the dazzling and tormenting Estella."<sup>13</sup>

But one stormy night the convict whom he had helped in his childhood met him and discovered that it was he who was supplying him money. His words distorted his heart in to pieces. Now Pip's hundred thousand emotions dashed to the ground and one after another he came to terms with painful reality. So now Pip comes to know that in making him a gentleman. Miss Havisham had only been a selfish governess. He remembered: "Miss Havisham's intentions towards me, all a mere dream: Estella not designed for me; I only suffered in Satis House as a convenience, a sting for the greedy

relation, a modal with a mechanical heart to practice on when no other practice was at hand; those were the first smarts ... I had but, sharpest and deepest pain of it all was that it was not for the convict, quality & I knew not what crimes ... that I had deserted Joe."(p.258.)

On the other hand the convict hoped by proxy to experience a life he had not lived. So in this way Magwitch and Miss Havisham had great expectations which they hoped to realize through the children they had adopted. Pip, thus, is treated as if he were a thing, manipulated by adults for the extraction of certain sensations, by making him feel guilty and diminished.

Pip, an imaginative boy is both, fearful and lonely because of his isolation from normal family ties and because of the oppressiveness of the atmosphere in the marsh country where he lives. He remains throughout the novel conscience stricken. Because of his imaginative character and deprived state, he consistently builds illusions of success on improper evidence and then proceeds to become a snob because of the pride he takes in those illusions. When Magwitch reappears, Pip comes face to face with the reality. He recognizes that Miss Havisham is not a fairy godmother; rather she is a pitiable neurotic whose life and surroundings are rotting before her eyes.

Pip is rootless in origin and unallocated in society. He lives in a society where full scale demolition of traditional values is going on, here people are becoming things and things are becoming more important than people. Pip's mind is consistently given to accepting absolute contrasts. To him Satis is everything that Joe's home is not; Joe is the exact opposite of Magwitch; Drummle is everything Estella should not accept; Mathew is antithetical to all the other pockets; Orlick is everything which renders him unsatisfactory for Biddy. His tendency to equate one pole with everything favourable and the other with everything odious eventually leads him to be taken in by appearances and he pays a heavy price for it.

Regarding the institution of marriage we are shocked when we come to know that Louisa is compelled to marry Bounderby, double from her age. Louisa has a lot of respect for her father. When Louisa is told about the marriage proposal of Bounderby she can't simply believe as her father is going to do great injustice to her. But she does not protest and accepts the proposal. She frankly tells that she has no choice in the matter. She says:

"What do I know, father," said Louisa in her quiet manner, of tastes and fancies: of aspirations and affections; of all that part of my nature in which such light thing might have been nourished? What escape have I had ... I have never a child's belief or a child's fear?" (p.99)

The above quotation is full of irony of situation that after being aware of the consequences Louisa bows before the wish of her father. But still she remains faithful to Bounderby till Harthouse appears. But ultimately her marriage with Bounderby fails and she realizes the reality of the education fostered through her childhood. Now she tells her father about her bitterness towards the system developed by him. Louisa told her father that in their childhood they were forbidden to show any liking for fine arts, fancy and imagination, entertainment and amusement in life,

"You must discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have in any object of use or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact" (p.8)

So, in this way Dickens has described the system of education in a satirical tone. This system of education aims at developing the mind or intellect of the growing child by feeding him upon facts and not allowing him to cultivate his emotions and his imagination.

Tom is very anxious that his sister should accept Bounderby's proposal of marriage. He urges her not to reject the proposal:

"Well, sister of mine", said Tom, 'when you say that, you are near my thoughts. We might be so much oftener together mightn't we? Always together, almost mightn't we? It would do me a

great deal of good if you were to make up your mind to I know what, Loo. It could be a splendid thing for me. It would be uncommonly jolly!"(p.93).

He is depicted as selfish, ill-natured and completely mercenary. And yet Tom does understand the defects of the system under which he and his sister have been brought up. In order to compensate himself for the frigidity of the discipline under which he was brought up, Tom now takes to evil courses. He is employed as a clerk in a bank owned by his sister's husband, Bounderby. He becomes a gambler and incurs heavy debts. He steals money from the bank in order to cover his gambling debts. He contrives a scheme to throw the blame on Stephen Blackpool, a worker in Bounderby's factory. He keeps asking his sister for money and receiving from her enough to pay his debts. Louisa tries to probe him in order to find out the truth but he stoutly disclaims all responsibility for the robbery. However, his conscience does prick him at this time. Stephen points to Tom as the real culprit when he is dying. Tom flees from the scene and takes shelter with Mr. Sleary at his circus. There he is overtaken by Bitzar, a student of Gradgrind's school and it is only through Mr. Sleary's devices that it becomes possible for him to escape to a foreign land.

In conclusion one can say that in both of these novels there is a little difference of the kind of exploitation. In *Great Expectations* Pip suffers due to the orphanage and he is used for the selfish motives. As a result his imagination of becoming a gentleman becomes an obsession for him and he accepts the ill-will of everyone in the *Satis House*. But at last he had to face the bitter reality for his wish of becoming a gentleman. Now he realizes that it was just an illusion.

As far as the life of children is concerned in *Hard Times*, it is not the outsiders who exploit, but the parents themselves. In *Great Expectations* the heroes of the novels suffer due to the absence of parents. But in *Hard Times* the children are subjected to the wrong kind of education and as a result their feelings are repressed. The parents want them to bring up according to

their philosophy but neither, they become good citizens, nor they are able to lead a life of comfort.

#### REFERENCES

- I. <sup>1</sup>Andre Mauris, *Dickens' England* (Western Printing Services Ltd., 2934), p. 12.
- II. <sup>2</sup>Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1861; rpt. New York: Rinchart, 1972), p.6.
- III. <sup>3</sup>George Gissing, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (London: Blackie and Son Ltd., 1909), P.156.
- IV. <sup>4</sup>Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.(1861; rpt. New York: Rinchart, 1972), p.9.
- V. <sup>5</sup>*From Pickwick to Dombey*, p.250.
- VI. <sup>6</sup>Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.(1861; rpt. New York: Rinchart, 1972), p.10.
- VII. <sup>7</sup>*Children of Charles Dickens*, p.133.
- VIII. <sup>8</sup>*Ibid*, p.256.
- IX. <sup>9</sup>*From Pickwick to Dombey*, p.253.
- X. <sup>10</sup>Edger Johnson; *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* Vol.11 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p.983.
- XI. <sup>11</sup>*Children of Charles Dickens*, p. 194.
- XII. <sup>12</sup>Edger Johnson; *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* Vol. 11 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p. 985.
- XIII. <sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 983.