



# Charles Dickens' Hard Times: A Critique Of Industrialism, Capitalism And Utilitarianism

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**Abstract** -In a prosperous society people should be allowed to live freely and empower lives without getting tied down by any boundaries .From the very beginning when production system started its new journey automatically class struggle accompanied with it in it's new way. Now-a-days class struggle is everywhere. When there was slavery system class struggle was between slave owners and slaves, in a feudal system there was class struggle between land owners and serfs, in a capitalist society it is between bourgeois and proletariat. In a capitalist society upper class people always exploit lower class people. They often suppressed and oppressed their workers as well .This approach is very clear in Charles Dickens novel Hard Times. Mr. Bounderby who is a manufacturer, banker and merchant called his workers 'hand'. Lower class people worked all the day with their hands only. Hand is the main source of their livelihood. The individual identities of the workers were replaced by the single word 'hand.'

**Key Words**- Suppressed, boundaries, exploited, equality, struggle, upper class, lower class and hand.

Hard Times is a social satire which is set in a fictional town named Coketown. It is a criticism of utilitarian education system in Victorian era. This education system is based on facts only and it completely demolishes imagination and emotional life. The story focuses the life of Mr. Gradgrind and his two children Louisa and Tom who suffers most for their father's fact based nurturing.

Thomas Gradgrind, an experimental private school teacher focuses his teachings on 'Facts' and 'Facts only'. He is a 'man of realities', is a man of 'facts and calculations'. Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy was that 'two and two are four and nothing over.' He is always ready to weigh and measure 'any parcel of human nature' with a rule, a pair of scales and the multiplication table which is always kept in his pocket. He understands that human nature is a case of arithmetic only. There is no space for fancy and imagination in his life, Fact is everything for him. His two children Louisa and Tom are the true replica of his oriented teaching. All though Louisa and Tom both suffers much for this fact oriented upbringing. They are not even allowed to learn fairy tales and nursery rhymes.

Marxism is based on temporal spatial reality. Time and place is very important in this philosophy. It is always a call for change, the main proprietor of this thinking. Karl Marx also talks about the change for betterment. It is a materialistic as well as progressive philosophy. Somehow It is a reaction of Rene Descartes' metaphysical thought " Ego cogito Ergo Some"( I think, therefore I exist). Marx said "I exist, therefore I think". In Marxist world struggle for existence decides the thinkings powers.

It is a very debating issue. Originally Marx's point is that 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness (Bertens 78).

Mr. Bounderby is a very close friend of Mr. Gradgrind. He is a man 'perfectly devoid of sentiments'. He did not believe spiritual connection between man and man. He is a manufacturer, merchant and banker, he is very rich also. Always He has a metallic laugh in his face and a staring attitude. He is younger than Mr. Gradgrind but he looks older. He considers himself as 'self made man'. He is bulgy of humility. It is very true that he is devoid of sentiments that's why he gives a marriage proposal for his friend's daughter who is almost half of his age. He didn't love her, he had no strong passion for her but decided to marry her. He gives that proposal to his friend and his friend Mr. Gradgrind was very glad for this proposal. Mr Gradgrind thought this marriage will bring a good fortune for his son Tom too.

Louisa is told about the marriage but she didn't utter a word. She was brought up by her father's fact oriented principles that's why she has no emotions and passion. When she was informed about Mr. Bounderby's proposal her question was - "Father", said Louisa, "do you think I love Mr. Bounderby?"

Mr. Gradgrind was extremely discomfited by this unexpected question question. "Well my child," he returned, "I really cannot take upon myself to say.

"Father", pursued Louisa in exactly the same voice as before, "do you ask me to love Mr. Bounderby?"

"My dear Luisa, no. No I ask nothing.

"Father", she still pursued "does Mr. Bounderby ask me to love him?"

"Really my dear," said Mr. Gradgrind, "it is difficult to answer your question \_"(B-i, Chap-xv)

This fact based upbringing suppressed all her human sentiments. Louisa failed to express the feelings that love is needed for marriage to her father. When her father was talking to her about her marriage she was starting out of the window at the factory chimneys so fixedly that her father asked why she was looking at them?

She replied quickly - "There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, fire bursts out, father!"

Her father said- " Of course I know that, Louisa. I do not see the application of the remark". (B-1, chap- xv)

Here her father whose principle was fact oriented didn't understand her mental situation that she is not ready to marry Mr. Bounderby. Luisa failed to express her thoughts. Mr. Bounderby's fact based idealism blinds him to see the essential humanity of his daughter. Finally she asked her father -

"Shall I marry him?"repeated Louisa, with great deliberation.

"Precisely. And it is satisfactory to me, as your father my dear Luisa...I now leave you to judge for yourself said Mr. Gradgrind."I have stated that case, as such cases are stated among practical minds;" (B-i, chap-xv)

When she was called by her father that it will bring a good fortune for her brother Tom too. Because of her love and concern for her brother she agrees for marriage. Without any any love, any strong passion for Mr. Bounderby she is ready to marry him. She sacrifices her entire life for her father's

happiness and brother's good fortune. She is treated here as an object. One can easily say that 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman' (Simon de Beauvoir, 301).

"Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity" by Judith Butler critically expresses how people understand gender roles in a society. Many people once thought that gender is innate and natural part of people existing in the world; Butler casts doubts on that concept describing gender as a social construct that can be changed in different circumstances and it is not in borne.

Sissy Jupe the tumbler's child was a classmate of Louisa and Tom .Her father is from a circus party. One day while Mr. Gradgrind was returning home he saw his children trying to peep the canvas wall of a circus tent and he was very shocked at their behaviour. Mr Gradgrind saw that his children were not sorry for their behaviour and breaking the rules. Mr Gradgrind and his friend Mr.Bounderby was talking about the loop whole which caused this, they discovered that Sissy's father is a stroller in a circus that's why they are trying to see something in a circus. They soon decided to dismiss Sissy from school and Mr. Gradgrind went to meet Sissy's father. But he discovered that her father deserted her. Her father is poor man,he is suppressed very often, he considers to be a failure man. Though he loves his darling daughter so much, he left her alone. Mr Gradgrind took the responsibility of Sissy in one condition no one from circus party will meet her. They agreed, Sissy cried out bitterly.'It was an act of helplessness. She wasn't used to being helpless' (The Shadow Lines,166).

Charles Dickens is always talking about social realism. He has a humanitarian touch to reform society. He is very sensitive about poor people. In many of his novels one can see that his heart is sympathetic to downtrodden people. Most of his novels contain miserable conditions of poor people. His depiction of Stephen Blackpool is very sensitive. Stephen Blackpool who is a poor weaver, unfortunately he married a woman who is a drunken woman and she often left him. Stephen loved a woman named Racheal who is also a worker in the factory. He wanted to be separated from his wife and wanted to marry Racheal. He discussed this fact with Mr Bounderby but he informed him that he has to pay one thousand pound to her wife as they were married for nineteen years. He became helpless. He lived in a state of frustration. He was very poor he cannot afford that large amount. Later the workers strike against Mr Bounderby. Stephen did not support them. His friends became very angry. Mr Bounderby asks him to be a spy for this union and he refused to be so. Mr Bounderby became furious and he fired him. Then Tom convince him for help and told him to meet him near Bank. That night bank was robbed and all the suspicion goes on Stephen. Later he died falling into a ditch. Richard Hoggart ,a thinker of cultural studies, 'has a strong sympathy for working class culture...'(Davidcarter,66).

Louisa is suffering from her helpless marriage, she becomes an easy prey of a seducer Mr. James Harthouse. His attitude is one of cynicism. His cynical attitude is attractive and Louisa becomes trapped in his seducing attitude. Mrs Sparsit always observes their behaviours. When they meet privately, Mrs Sparsit follows them, suddenly she thinks they eloped. And Mrs. Sparsit delivers the news to Mr. Bounderby. Actually Louisa didn't eloped, she went to meet her father only to state her condition. Mr Gradgrind was shocked at her 'colourless, so dishevelled, so defiant and despairing' look and he asked-

"What is it? I conjure you, Louisa, tell me what is the matter."

She dropped into a chair before him, and put her cold hand on his arm.

"Father, you have trained me from my cradle?"

"Yes, Louisa."

"I curse the hour in which I was born to such a destiny."

He looked at her in doubt and dread, vacantly repeating: "Curse the hour? Curse the hour?"

"How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What you have done, O father, what you have done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here?"

She struck herself with both her hands upon her bosom" (B-ii, chap-xii).

After a long discussion with her father she came to a conclusion that "All that I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me. Now, father, you have brought me to this. Save me by some other means!".....she cried out in a terrible voice, "I shall die if you hold me! ... "

And he 'saw the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system, lying, an insensible heap, at his feet .(B-ii, Chap-xii).

Mr. Gradgrind' fact based philosophy becomes a problem for him also. Bitzer who is a student of Mr. Gradgrind is lived by his fact oriented principles. Bitzer is very rational character, he is humourless, he has no emotions and passion and he is without any fillial affection. His mind is very much regulated. He didn't want any recreation he clearly stated that 'I don't want a wife and a family' .He serves as a light porter at Mr. Bounderby's bank: "He was a very light porter indeed; as light in the days...". When Mr. Bounderby's bank was robbed, he has great doubt about Tom. And Finally he caught Tom for his misdeeds. Mr Gradgrind requested him to free Tom but he refused to do so and Mr Gradgrind questions-

"Bitzer", said Mr Gradgrind, broken down and miserably submissive to him, "have you any heart"?

"The circulation, sir", returned Bitzer, smiling at the oddity of the question," couldn't be carried on without one. No man, sir, acquainted with the facts established by Hervey relating to the circulation of the blood, can doubt that I have a heart."( B-iii, chap- Viii). Mr. Gradgrind' own philosophy makes problem for him.

Utilitarianism is presented here. It is a cold philosophy that focuses only raw facts over human sentiments, emotion, passions and love. It is a dehumanizing philosophy Here the novelist criticized Victorian society by showing how 'fact 'oriented lifestyle destroys human sentiments how it smashes family bondings. This approach is rendering human beings as industrial machines only .Mr.Gradgrind' fact based approach blinds him, for his philosophy his daughter becomes trapped in a loveless marriage and she falls an easy prey of a seducer. His own son Tom is ruined for his fact oriented upbringings. Finally Mr. Gradgrind realized his fault and he didn't send his daughter to her husband. With the help of Sissy Tom was sent to abroad. He realized that only facts are not necessary for living. Later he became a learned man.

When Mrs Sparsit accused a lady for sending Tom away, Mr. Bounderby burst into fury to Mrs Sparsit because this old lady Mrs Pegler was his mother. Mr. Bounderby who considers himself as a 'self made man' proved false. He dismissed Mrs Sparsit . Because of his 'devoid of sentiments' attitude Mr. Bounderby makes his conjugal relationship into a burden. Later he died alone.

It is not about men and women, upper class and lower class people but it is regressive society that keeps defining men in different ways. 'Each age must strive to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it' (Walter Benjamin, 28). If people want to bring a remarkable change in society they should empower lower class people through education and they

should be given equal opportunities in working places and in our societies. G.K. Chesterton very clearly stated that '...superiority emerged from the great ecstasy of equality and its ambience of passionate unconsciousness and bewildering community of thought men do become more than themselves. Almost without exception all the great men have come out of this atmosphere of equality'. (Ghosh P-241).

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