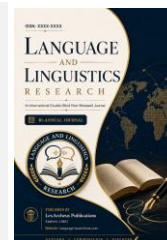




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Industrialisation and Social Inequality in Victorian English Novels

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ABSTRACT

The Victorian era witnessed unprecedented industrial growth, transforming Britain's economic, social and cultural landscape. While industrialisation stimulated technological advancement and urban expansion, it also intensified social inequality, poverty, class divisions and labour exploitation. Victorian English novelists responded to these developments by portraying the realities of industrial society and exposing the hardships faced by the working class. This study examines the representation of industrialisation and social inequality in selected Victorian English novels, analysing how literary narratives critique the consequences of rapid industrial growth through realistic depictions of class conflict, urban poverty and unequal distribution of wealth. Employing a qualitative approach based on textual analysis, the study explores the ways in which Victorian fiction reflects the tensions between industrial progress and human welfare. The findings suggest that Victorian novels function not only as literary works but also as powerful social commentaries that raise awareness of economic injustice, advocate social reform and remain relevant to contemporary discussions on inequality and social justice.

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INTRODUCTION

The Victorian era (1837–1901) was an extremely influential time in British history, characterized by fast industrialization, technological progress and growth in cities. The Industrial Revolution, which is basically the beginning of the mechanised industries and factory-based production in the country, dramatically changed the country's economic structure and replaced the traditional occupational system based on agriculture and handicrafts. These achievements were part of Britain's economic success and world power status, but they also brought deep social problems such as high unemployment, lack of jobs, poverty, exploitation of cheap labour, and widening social divisions between rich and poor. The social conditions became increasingly significant writing themes addressed by the Victorian writers, who documented, critiqued and interpreted the consequences of industrial society in literature. Victorian English novels thus became strong literary responses to the social and economic changes that created the context of nineteenth-century Britain.

Not only did the industrialisation of economic production change the lives of people but also every day life. There was emigration from the rural areas to the fast growing industrial cities where employment opportunities were available, thus giving rise to the development of overcrowded urban towns with poor living conditions, lack of universal sanitation facilities and sub standard working environments. The factory workers - men, women, children worked long hours, made little money and had very unsafe working environments, and industrial capitalists made a lot of money. Unequal distribution of economic resources accentuated class differences and raised employer-employee issues. It was these sorts of circumstances that gave the Victorian novelists ample fodder to discuss the moral and social implications of industrialization.

Victorian literature gained new importance as a way of revealing the truth of industrial society and its toll on humankind. Novelists like Charles Dickens, E.G. Benson, Thomas Hardy and Benjamin Disraeli, led by Dickens, depicted the lives of ordinary people living in poverty, unemployment, social and class inequality. In contrast, these writers did not sing unapologetically of industrial achievement, but were aware of the paradoxes between the success of Britain's material growth and the miseries of a significant number of

their countrymen. They conveyed a realistic task of society observation and strong narration to stimulate a reader's consciousness to acknowledge the need to show compassion, justice and social change. Victorian novels created characters who became famous and described the industrial communities in detail, causing people to be more aware of the social issues that most of the political and economical institutions did not have their back.

Realistic depictions of class divisions are one of the hallmarks of the Victorian English novel. The century saw the rise of a new industrial working class with experiences that were very different from those of the wealthier middle and upper classes. The Victorian novelists capitalized on these divisions by creating two opposing living experiences, two opposing schools, and two opposing jobs and employment opportunities, as well as two opposing standards of living. As wealth and power were concentrated in some individuals, literary disagreements often highlighting structural inequalities within an industrial society followed. Victorian fiction spoke to readers, offering both perspectives: privileged and disadvantaged, leading them to consider, then, the moral duties of person or institution for the solution of social injustice.

Industrialisation cannot only be linked to economic considerations but is also part of other debates surrounding morality, human dignity and social responsibility that also appear in Victorian literature. When industrial capitalism became more important than the care of human welfare, many novelists attacked this emphasis on industrial capitalism, as they demonstrated that materialism often hindered family relations, values and the health of ties with others. Labor characters were often depicted as symbols of economic strength – and factory owners, politicians, members of the privileged classes were symbols of resilience, perseverance and the struggle to survive. Literary depictions were important pieces of history as well as literature, as they stood as a reflection of the cultural and social issues of the day, such as issues with labour, education, and public health and social reform.

This research attempts to evaluate the depiction of industrialization and social inequality in some of the novels written in the Victorian Era in English, by examining literature that shows an impact of industrialization on various parts of the society. It discusses the correlation between industrial development and class conflict and class



injustice and the role of literature in the awareness of economic inequality and social reform. The objective of the study is to show that the Victorian English novels are also of great relevance as a source of understanding of the social problems arising due to the period of industrialisation and are also still relevant to social problems of inequality, justice and human welfare that arise in the contemporary world.

Victorian English Novels and the Industrialisation and Social Conditions

This was the Victorian era of Britain's industrial boom which saw Britain become one of the world's major industrial power plants. During this period, the building of factories, the introduction of new working methods and machinery, the construction of railways and the growth of urban areas completely transformed the economic and social situation of the country. Industrialisation brought wealth and technological progress and commercial prosperity, but also severe social and economic inequalities affecting millions. These dramatic shifts were evident in Victorian English novelists and a primary avenue for the documentation of the realities of industrial civilisations. Instead of uncritical apologies for the industrial advances, they focused on industrial human side effects, which they mapped in their work through the visual depiction of poverty, labour exploitation, sleazy urbanized zones, damaged environment, and the growing class divisions. Their novels were also important social statements, drawing attention to apparent inequities between material improvement and human suffering and instilling in readers a sense of moral obligations due to the advances being made in human society in this material sphere" (Altick, 1974).

The changes produced by industrialisation were radical in Britain in its traditional way of life. Industries began to bring in masses of workers and quickly advanced to industrial towns like Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds, leaving behind the rural populations. Labor migration from villages to cities led to very high population densities of the urban regions and shortfalls in the provision of housing, sanitation and public health facilities. Victorian novelists vividly portrayed these conditions, by describing smoke-filled streets, polluted rivers, overcrowded housing and overcrowded working class neighbourhoods. These depictions make it clear that industrialisation was not only an economic shift but a social revolution,

which impacted family life, community relations, and labour relations. The genre of fiction is a key source of nineteenth-century British society, because it was, according to Richard D. Altick (1974), a product of the Victorian form of writing which expressed the social anxieties of an era of rapid industrial change and its impact upon everyday life.

The industrial factory system was one of the most important features of Victorian Britain and is featured prominently in many Victorian novels. Factories appeared to symbolise technological advancement and economic productivity but also conditions of hard work and inequality between employers and workers. Men, women and children were employed very long hours to work in hazardous conditions and paid very little, which was not enough to support their basic living standard. In industrial capitalism, the interest of production and profit took precedence, and at times, the interest of the employees was not considered at all. The Victorian novelists saw the factory worker as a person whose physical state, emotional status, and family circumstances were greatly impacted by what seemed to be hibernating ticking time bombs of industrial drudgery. It was through such portrayals that the literature raised doubts about the fuel for economic growth being one that did not preserve human dignity nor increase social justice (Benson 2003).

One of the most important fall-outs of industrialisation was class inequality. There was very little equality between the business classes (the big factory owners, the merchants and the industrial entrepreneurs) who garnered in wealth and those who were labourers who created them. There are a number of ways in which these differences and contrasts are highlighted in Victorian fiction, such as contrasting opulent houses for the people of wealth with poor quarters for factory workers. The differences reveal economic disparities and inequality in an Industrialised society. However, working-class families frequently had to make do with less than sufficient provisioning for basic food, clothing, health and education, while providing the necessary thrust for Britain's economic success. These works of literature challenged the reader to see the inequitable nature of industrial achievements and the often domination of weak social groups (Altick, 1974).

The economic situation was an important factor in the lives of working classes communities.



Factory jobs paid a steady wage, but generally failed to provide financial security. Economic depressions left workers without employment; industrial accidents and illness left workers without benefits; there were no social welfare systems and families were left without on the brink of poverty. The novelists of the Victorian era realistically represented the insecurity of industrial work and the impact of economic insecurities on family relations, children's education and on community life. Such tales emphasised the emotional, in addition to financial effects of poverty and also revealed that material deprivation had a tendency to affect personal dignity and also psychological health. British industrial expansion should not be taken for granted as providing economic security for the working class and Joseph A. Benson (2003) contends that this was not the case for Victorians, as evidenced in contemporary fiction.

Along with industrialisation, urbanisation has an equally significance position in the Victorian English novel. As population grow rapidly, the existing urban infrastructure became obsolete leading to overcrowded dwellings, lack of sanitation and the spread of diseases. In a literary context, industrial cities were often called polluted, noisy, unhealthy environments, a description frequently used by novelists. These descriptions were not only the background settings, but also the symbolization of a broader range of social problems brought about by the unregulated expansion of industrialization. They created an urban landscape that is a symbolic document of inequality: the location of the buildings and the structures themselves showed the economic inequities between the prosperous industrialists and the poor working classes. This imagery suggested that the Victorian novel was physically modern but not socially progressive; whether it was true progress or the creation of new suffering forms or not, was open to question (Burton, 2001).

In Victorian fiction, too, women are a major topic. The process of industrialisation opened up employment opportunities for many women, often in textile mills and factories, but the jobs were very poorly paid, poorly working conditions and few legal safeguards. Women were typically asked to carry dual duties; as they worked hard in the industrial sector, they also worked hard at home which embodied the double burden on working-class families. Victorian novelists' characterization of female workers as strong characters who face economic exploitation and gender inequality. Such depictions extended the definition of literature

coverage of industrialisation and how it affected the lives of both men and women in different classes. A theme that came to the fore in many Victorian literary works was the interconnectedness of industrial working, male/female relations and the imperial economy, themes that were increasingly acknowledged by Victorian sociologic/political debates (2001: Antoinette Burton).

Child labour is another striking example of the social outcomes and impacts of industrialisation. Employment of young male and female workers in factories, mines and workshops was common with many Victorian families relying on the children's work to augment family income. In literature, the images of child labour reveal the physical risk and impact on education and childhood emotions faced by young workers. The Victorian novelists situated childhood as fragile and imbued with the potential of economic use, attacking systems industrial-focused that did not place a priority on wellbeing. It became clear that the literature could be used to stir public discussion about both the need for labour reform and compulsory education (Benson, 2003).

Industrialisation also changed how people relate with one another and within the community. Interpersonal relationships and similar customs were common traits of traditional rural societies, while industrial cities fostered social anonymity, competition and fragmentation. The idea of loneliness and isolation in the midst of the urban, and in the midst of the reader, is a recurring feature of Victorian novels. The economy came at cost of decreasing avenues for community involvement and increasing the need for financial interdependence instead of generosity. The literature indicates that the psychological and cultural impacts of industrialization were as significant as material impacts and that they were represented in a similar fashion. The moral characteristics of industrial society were in constant focus by Victorian writers in exploring these dialectic precepts of economic modernisation and human values interest and criticism (Altick 1974).

Social inequalities were also exacerbated by the unequal distribution of power in industrial Britain, both political and economic. Industrialization created an imbalance of power, with the factory owners and members of the middle and upper classes holding a great deal of influence over employment, housing and local governance, and the working class community with few opportunities to improve their situation. Often in



Victorian literature, this disparity is expressed in conflicts between the elite of the industrial class and the poor of the working class, and highlights the influence of the economy on daily life. Few novelists considered poverty a failure on the part of individuals, but instead, saw deeper structural fault lines in industrial capitalism. They invited the reader to reflect on how effective social institutions are in safeguarding weak groups as opposed to fulfilling the interests of the privileged groups (Burton 2001).

Victorian novels are thus not only innovative texts of fiction but also valuable historical records, recording the deep changes in society and the economy induced by industrialisation. By creating realistic characters, descriptive passages and intriguing stories, Victorian authors uncovered the tension between advances in technology and benefits to humanity. They recognized the economic advantages of industrialization and yet also pointed to its differential impact on women, the dispossessed, children and workers.

Class, Poverty and Labour in Victorian English Novels

Fiction, with an aim towards exposing inequalities and hardships of the working class, played a crucial role in exposing Victorian novelists and their profound social transformations instituted by industrialisation. During the 19th century industry rose by a tremendous rate in explosive economic development which was also accompanied by severe poverty, exploitation of labour and ever-growing class distinctions. By looking at the human costs of industrialisation, Victorian writers challenged the image of industrialisation as a symbol of national progress by depicting the lives of those who faced hardships and struggled to make a living in a fairly unequal economic system. Literature serves as a good tool for social critic and public awareness because their novels gave a glimpse of the different lives of the material rich industrial capitalists from that of the deprived labours. In the realistic context, the memorable characters and these interesting stories led Victorian fiction to challenge the moral premises of industrial society, and to demand more sympathy for the oppressed and impoverished (Hudson, 1992).

Two of the most obvious traits of Victorian literature are the writing of social inequality. Industrialisation contributed much towards

increasing the wealth/poverty divide and producing a class divided society. The working class earned wages and incomes that were useful to industrial production, but few of the working class families were adequately able to provide for themselves and the factory bosses, merchants and industrial entrepreneurs had gained huge wealth. The novelists of the Victorian era continually emphasised these contrasts in vivid detail, via striking images of grand houses lived in by the middle classes and thriving dingy slums crammed at their doorstep by the working classes. Such contrasts highlighted inequalities in industrial wealth and the often-enfranchisement of "vulnerable groups. Pat Hudson (1992) suggests that Britain's economic structure changed as a result of the Industrial Revolution, though the social divisions that were sharpened by this change were also more noticeable in nineteenth-century urban society.

Known as one of the most influential novelists of the Victorian period Charles Dickens exposed the inequalities of society and poverty. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens exposes the workhouses and the criminal underworld, and young orphans' sufferings to show how poverty often was due to the individual's failings rather than their own. The novel shows that vulnerable's education, job opportunities or social protection were denied, trapping many to degradation and exploitation. Dickens is questioning the idea that poverty is a result of poor moral character by drawing us into Oliver's experiences in providing a counterpoint to that notion such that we may view poverty as a product of a lack of supports in the social and economic institutions surrounding people that could limit their poor moral choices (Dickens, 1992). He was a sympathetic portrayal of the poor, inspiring readers to see themselves in that condition, and to challenge their own ideas of social responsibility and welfare.

Poverty is represented in Victorian fiction in such a substantial way that poverty is a central theme within it; symbolically poverty indicates the inequitable results of industrial capitalism. All Victorians novelists paint a picture of poverty as more than just the absence of money, it is a problem of the physical body, the emotional state, the education, the dignity of the individual. The housing, poverty, and the lack of medical care and secure jobs in the industrial towns were often problems that stunted family life-styles resulted in low social mobility. The reality of these conditions is captured with great emotionality, so that the



reader will be able to feel the daily trials faced by the working classes. Friedrich Engels (1987), in his famous work on the industrial Britain, chronicled conditions with examples of overcrowded houses, poor sanitation and unsafe workplace conditions in many industrial cities. These social observations were translated into evocative stories by Victorian novelists that helped spread public sympathy for the statistical facts.

During Victorian times the divisions in the classes became greater as economic and social differences arose under the influence of industry. The middle and upper classes enjoyed gaining entrée to a new, expanding commercial world, but the working class was still stuck in low pay industrial jobs. Such encounters between these classes are explored in many Victorian novels to uncover the power imbalance, the privilege, and the opportunity imbalance in industrial society. Education, access to health services, housing and political influence were often at the discretion of the rich person, furthering inequalities experienced across generations. In terms of society and class, novelists depicted such divisions in virtue of the characters on whose lives they had a profound impact, thus displaying the significant role that class played in determining life outcomes and individual aspirations. A benefit of such storytelling was that readers were made to see that income inequity was not a natural result of a person's attainment of economic success, but a structural feature of industrial society (Hudson, 1992).

Labour exploitation is another significant issue in Victorian writing. The factory setting brought forth challenging employment conditions with heavy working hours, hazardous equipment, low pay and little legal rights for workers. Men, women and children often worked under unsafe conditions to affect their physical and mental health. Victorian novelists described these facts by drawing pictures of people who lived their lives in the service of menacing industrial labor, with hardly any time for rest, schooling or diversification. These representations were an open challenge to moral principles of the economic systems that focused on production and profit instead of human welfare. Engels (1987) also claimed that the productive power of capitalist industries was built on the systematic exploitation of labour and consequently left many to be pauperized and living on the edge.

The theme exploitation of children is one of the most disturbing aspect of the industrialisation

depicted in Victorian literature. The poor condition of the family necessities children to go into factory, mines and workshops to do hard and hazardous labour at low wages. Dickens starkly reveals the helplessness children become when they are uncared for and subjected to abuse and exploitation through small characters who suffer this neglect. In industrial society, Dickens shows that children's poverty made them subject to poverty's economic pressures, that childhood itself was economically exploited, and that poverty denied children security and means to develop their personality (1992). These images elicited significant public sympathy and led to the pursuit of reform of education and curbing of child labour.

Industrial development itself was tightly linked to urbanisation, which further contributed to the social inequality. Fast population growth in industrial cities led to slum areas with a high population density, poorly equipped with sanitation facilities, with contaminated environments and with poor quality housing. Victorian novelists often used the urban setting to illustrate economic inequality: when money is lacking, and money is so richly available, but when money and poverty are so separated by social divisions. According to Alexander Welsh (1971) Dickens' portrayal of London portrays a city paragon of class divide, with its own urban space reflecting inequalities in Victorian society. The physical context then is a further manifestation of social inequality, and is an expression of industrial development's effect on the landscape and social life.

A social reformer, Dickens wrote a number of public speeches as well as novels. Throughout his writing career, K. J. Fielding (1960) demonstrates that the novelist was fault-finding on the costs of poverty, poor education and the rejection of the weak and voiceless. The public interventions show that Dickens considers literature an instrument to encourage people to become responsible and to draw public opinion to social injustice. This drive for revealing inequality was not just confined to fiction and garbagedom, for his own life was full of injustice. Such an injustice-fighting spirit was not restricted to literature; in the reefs of his life, he was filled with injustice.

The novelist's compassion for the poor and needy members of Victorian society is further highlighted in John Forster's (1874) biography of Charles Dickens. Dickens' life and personal experiences, and his observations of poor,



workhouses and urban hardship, are described and how these experiences influenced his literary imagination is explained. Dickens' conversant understanding of social inequality helped him to depict working class reality with remarkable accuracy and emotional depth. His novels thus reveal not just a high order of artistic creativity but a sustained treatment and attempt to tackle the moral consequences of industrialisation through fiction in a manner.

Psychological impacts of poverty and exploitation also received a strong focus in Victorian novelists. Despair, pessimism, indigestion and social isolation were common symptoms of distress when faced with economic hardships, and a lack of security often eroded the lives of people to a level of such despair that their aspirations were lost. Emotional symptoms of people who are facing unemployment, debt and insecure housing can be just as acute as material struggles, bringing home the reality of the fact that poverty can hurt people's mental health and personal dignity as well as their bank accounts. Such illustrations expose the multi-faceted social-psychological nature of poverty, and refute simple arguments about it. In the context of his realistically-drawn characters, Victorian fiction brought the marginalised into public discourse, and encouraged readers to substitute 'feeling' for 'judging upon their merits' (Engels, 1987).

The moral criticism in Victorian literature sets it apart from the historical and economic histories of industrialisation. Historians record economic growth and technological advances, but novelists write about the impact on the personal life, family and community. They question and give readers pause over the question of whether economic progress is a meaningful one when it goes hand-in-hand with exploitation, inequality and widespread human suffering. Victorian writers played a major part in raising issues of public concern that arose from the conflicts between industrial development and social injustice, such as labor reform, education, and housing and welfare. So literature became a vehicle powerful enough to discuss and dispute the moral aspects of industrial capitalism (Hudson, 1992).

English Novels and Social Reform in Victorian England

Victorian English novels have a special importance in the history of English literature since they not only provided artistic expression but they also were excellent tools of social criticism at a time

when Britain was undergoing one of its most radical changes. The 19th century of rapid industrialization transformed the country's economic and social environment with the introduction of technologies, urban growth and economic prosperity. However these were challenges with fraught class division, exploitation of labour, urban poverty and poor living conditions. Victorian novelists were keenly aware of these dangers and they use realistic fiction in order to reveal the inequities of the industrial age. They challenged dominant social frameworks, as patterns of poverty and suffering faced among the working class were identified and fretted over, alongside calls for improvements that would bring justice and human welfare. This made the novels an important part of the public debates over industrialisation and morality in Victorian novels (Altick, 1974).

A key success of Victorian fiction was the ability to suggest the human implications of industrialisation through drama about 'everyday people'. Novelists instead emphasized the lives of the industrialized people—men who worked in factories, children, women, and poor families who were affected by the factory and the city, rather than façadeatic industrial growth which was expressed in terms of economic statistics or technological advances. These authors created realism in their characterisations and detailed social observation, bringing to life the reality of economic progress in the lives of the characters and a reality of hardship as well. Their novels proved their commitment that economic development was not the only criterion to evaluate, but also the impact on human dignity, family life and community welfare. Richard D. Altick (1974) suggests that Victorian literature reflected the thoughts of a time when industry was ushering in optimism and a broad sense of uncertainty about the social implications of it.

Charles Dickens is a classic example of the most influential literary critics in the industrial society. Also consistently in his novels he throws light on poverty, inequalities and institutional abuse, pointing the reader towards sympathy with the weaker forces in the society. Dickens shows the failures of workhouses, charitable institutions and the courts in *Oliver Twist* which often neglected the poor, not protecting them. Dickens' account of Oliver's life, in this way, helps him to illustrate that poverty frequently has nothing to do with a poor character, but is the outcome of structural inequality, known and assumed by many Victorian readers (Dickens, 1992). Dickens brought an



empathy, a concern for the humanize the other and the abused, thus sparking a desire for compassion and reform rather than punishment and social exclusion.

Another method by which Victorian fiction helped raise awareness of class injustice was by depicting the disparity between the social position of men and women and the availability of wealth and opportunity in industrial Britain. Warehouse owners and traders made a lot of money for their owners, yet numerous workers received hardly any decent compensation for their physically demanding activities after a whole day's worth of work. Novelists drew attention to these differences in contrasting the comforts of the wealthy homes with the cramped living conditions of the working classes, highlighting how a good education was dependent on manacles and exploitation of the people in it. Such portrayals in letters raised questions about the moral values of industrial society and the duty of the government, privileged social groups, and/or the employer to the poor. John Benson (2003) commentaries that as industrialisation grew greater so did class differences and the dividing of classes had become even more apparent within Victorian society and literature.

Virtually the same assertion could be made for the depiction of the realities of workers' exploitation, which further cemented novels as instruments for social reform by the Victorians. Many factory workers were forced to work in unhealthy environments, earn poor wages, and frequently be overworked and given minimal legal rights. There was a heavy reliance on women and children as cheap labour in certain situations leading them to be vulnerable to exploitation. Novelists presented this with great sensuousness, and readers were able to savor physical and mental effects of industrial work. Friedrich Engels (1987) also chronicled the difficult lives lived by the industrial working class, reporting overcrowded housing, unhealthy working environments, and a wealth of poverty in Britain's industrial towns. Victorian fiction matched such social studies by portraying these conditions in personal narratives that elicited readers' sympathies and concern.

Victorian English novels also make an important contribution in terms of critique of urbanisation. 19th century industrial cities grew quickly and tens of thousands of peasants flocked to these cities that offered more work. But poor

planning had led to overcrowding, contaminated environment, gross unsanitation and ill health etc. Novelists channelled these urban settings into powerful symbols of inequality, and illustrated the way that industrial development often overlooked ordinary citizens. For Alexander Welsh (1971), however, Dickens's depiction of the city has taught us that there is a lot of fragmentation in London and that money and poverty live side by side but are kept apart by imperceptible divisions of class and privilege. The literature used fictional devices to urge readers to think about the connection of economic growth and social duty.

In addition to pressuring for change, Victorian novels highlighted areas of damage in modern day social institutions. Inadequate protection for vulnerable groups was often provided by workhouses, educational institutions, the law, and charities among others. Dickens repeatedly condemned these institutions for their inefficiency, lack of compassion and their bureaucracy, and he insisted that true social advances could not be achieved by mere philanthropy. His speaking on public subjects also demonstrate his desire for better education, for poverty alleviation, for humanitarianism within Victorian society (Fielding 1960). Literature simultaneously in turn acted as a contribution to other reform efforts aimed at shaping conditions for the betterment of disadvantaged populations.

Influence spanned beyond literary audience as many of the novels sparked public debate on issues of labour conditions and policies relating to education and welfare. Poverty and injustice were depicted vividly, and challenged them to dislodge comfortable assumptions about the industrial progress. Novelists produced works that tapped into the hearts of readers and gave rise to newfound social awareness of issues that could have been overlooked or ignored. Dickens was convinced that literature had a moral obligation to impact upon public opinion, not just the views, but also the actions of people, explains John Forster (1874). Artistic accomplishment and a lifelong dedication to humanitarian reform were therefore woven into his novels.

Women have an important place in the criticism of Victorian industrial society. Often also women's economic problems are considered together with workplace and family gender inequality. Working-class women had to work in factories, and they took on domestic duties as well,



but they earned less than men and were denied the opportunities. This was an oversimplification to make evident to Victorian novelists that industrialisation had different impacts for different social groups. The image of tough, courageous, and selfless female characters created by them helped to spread the awareness of social outcomes of industrial capitalism and led to demand for more equitable labour practices and education systems (Burton, 2001).

Children also were central to Victorian social criticism. Faced with dangerous working conditions many children were thrown into unsafe work activities, many children's education was lost due to industrialization, and many children were exposed to severe poverty and lack of livelihoods. Dickens and other novelists related this through moving stories to show children's lack of security, health, and personal development because of economic necessity. Child characters came to be used as narratives of terror and as a means to demonstrate the moral downfall of industrial society and reinvigorate movement for its change. These images helped to flood the public with a sense of "superior civilizations" and create a "crowd of sympathy" for changing child labour laws and better welfare measures aimed at the protection of youthful populations (Dickens 1992).

Victorian fiction explored similarly the new questions of Victorian moral obligation regarding wealth and privilege. Much of the novelists depiction of his wealthy characters was of their outlook regarding poverty and the larger social attitude towards charity, responsibility and justice. Some were very generous and compassionate and some were not aware of the difficulties of the industrial workers. The different depictions prompted readers to examine their own ethical responsibilities in unequal society. Literature thus was used to foster the element of empathy and develop an increased awareness of the interdependence of an economy and a nation's well being (Altick, 1974).

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The most important thing about Victorian English novels is that they are both artistically good, and social in their content. Written during the 19th century, they still make sense today as many of the subjects discussed in the texts, such as the discourses on economic inequality, labour exploitation, urban poverty and differentiated access to opportunities, are useful references. They are both historically informative and contemporary in their commentaries on the troubled debates about economic justice and workers' rights and social equality. The Industrial Revolution of 1992 brought about a dramatic change in British society, and Victorian literature is one of the most significant cultural documents of its successes and its price to humanity. (Pat Hudson 1992)

CONCLUSION

Victorian English novels give a deep critique about the social and economic ill-effects of industrialisation by revealing the facts of poverty, class inequality, labour exploitation and the woes of urban life. Written with a realistic style of storytelling and socially conscious characters, Victorian novelists brought to a wide audience the inequalities of wealth and the human price of fast pace industrialization. Their works questioned and challenged the social attitudes of the time and depicted and illustrated the working class and those in need of protection who are vulnerable. These novels not only presented the facts of the nineteenth-century but also called for that compassion, that justice, that useful social reform. Through the study it has been proved that Victorian fiction is an effective medium of public awareness about the negative impacts of industrialisation and ethical reflection on issues of equality and human dignity. For this reason, Victorian novels continue to be important literary and historical documents, with continuing relevance for the link between economic development, social justice and the persistent need for inclusive equitable societies.



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