

## Social Injustice Issues As Reflected In Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*: A Sociological Approach

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### ABSTRACT

*Charles Dickens Famous novel Oliver Twist is a story about the poor people in England who got bad treatment from the society and from the vicinity. Dicken describes unfair condition of people especially children during Victorian era. A Lot of poor people, poor children during the Victorian period were sent to workhouses. The aim is to find out social problems like social inequality, social injustices, discrimination, prejudice etc within Charles Dickens's works. This study uses different methods and approaches of literary sociology and *Oliver Twist* as supporting data. All the theories mentioned succeed in answering problems revealed in the study, especially regarding social injustice. In The end this study has resulted that social injustice occurred during Victorian era and was depicted by Dickens in his novel. The social injustice could be seen within the charters occupation, the way of their behavior, their dressing, living environment, eating habitats, style of wearing clothes, and material wealth.*

**Keywords:** Poor condition, Social injustice, Oliver Twist

### INTRODUCTION

Man is a social animal and is destined to live side by side with the people around. Every person wants to be accepted in society, many kinds of people are different one from another in their perception, thinking and feeling. Therefore, individuals in one society ought to unite their perception, thinking and feeling to sensible relationship. However, it is so difficult for people to accept the others in society. Some groups in society have a habit to verify person's behavior then decide whether he could be accepted or not. Moreover, a lot of groups believe that material is the only way to determine whether a person can be accepted in society. It means that if a person is rich he is accepted and respected. This principle makes these communities have a perception that money is everything. And from this step, the social class gap happens in society.

*Oliver Twist* (1837-39) is Dickens first novel to carry a social commentary and represents a radical changes in themes. Dickens explores several social themes in *Oliver Twist*, however three are predominant: the abuses of the new Poor Law system, the evils of the criminal world in London and injustices with children. The critique of the law of 1834 and the administration of the work-house is bestowed within the first chapters of *Oliver Twist*. Dickens criticizes the Victorian workhouse which was run according to the regime of prolonged hunger, physical punishment, humiliation and hypocrisy.

*Oliver Twist*, a novel by Charles Dickens shows up the life of a young boy who had to face harassments during his life. Oliver had to struggle to gain his freedom and happiness even though there were so many obstacles that he faced. Many poor, unlucky children during the

Victorian period born were sent to workhouses, and were given horrible punishment and had to face horrible fates during that period.

The writer chooses the topic of social injustice issues because he is interested in discussing the issue. Social injustice such as social inequality, prejudice, and discrimination are essentially a problem that has been widely known. It talks about the power of status in the society based on the property that people have.

The reason why the writer is interested in this study is because *Oliver Twist* talked about the children's condition in England in 1830s. The writer thinks that young children like them did not deserve to face the torture. They also did not deserve to work at the workhouse or mills at their age; they should get much love and good life. These conditions did not happen in England in 1830s. After the Industrial revolution, the children had to face the hard life and as a result, many of them died at the young age.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociological literary is the branch of literature that is reflective. Reflective means involved in careful thinking and thought. Literary work cannot be separated from social life. According to Laurenson and Swingwood there are three perspectives regarding the sociological literary approach.

(1) the study that looked at literature as a social document in which a reflection on the current situation of the literary works when it was written,

(2) The study that revealed a literature as a mirror of the author's social life situation.

(3) the study literature as a manifestation of historical events and socio-cultural circumstances. Those entire things can stand alone or be revealed in a sociological literary approach.

## Victorian Era of Great Britain

The Victorian Era was preceded by the Regency they might notice that the Victorian contemplate their age stable and secure. It is often defined as the years from 1837 to 1901, when Queen Victoria reigned, though many historians believe that the passage of the Reform act 1832 marks true inception of a new cultural era. The Victorian era was preceded by the Regency that might notice era that the Victorian contemplate did not their age stable and secure.

In Europe nation throughout the Victorian era, social divisions of sophistication were a major part of people's daily lives. Victorian views on category and social division are represented in great detail by Charles Dickens in of his several of his novels printed during the Victorian period. Dickens's *Oliver Twist* is one of his works that tells the classification between the poor and the wealthy.

## Working Conditions in England

In the 18th century the population growth rate was faster than ever before. There are four primary reasons which may be cited for this growth, declining in the death rate, increasing in the birth rate, good medical facilities and the most significant reasons was the people were consuming healthier diet. In this time a half of the England's people were paupers thanks to the revolution. The fore most suffered was the farmers because they had to change as workers within the mills or factories

## Social Injustice

The word social injustice means a concept relating to the perceived fairness or injustice of a society in its division of rewards and burdens. The concept is distinct from those of justice in law, which may not or be considered moral in practice.

## Social Inequality

In society, there is always a class or caste groupings that cause the social inequality. clarified that in most communities there is a gap in the distribution of wealth and other benefits such as status and power.

### **Prejudice**

Prejudice is an irrational hostile attitude, fear and hatred towards a particular group. Meanwhile, social prejudice is that the thinking of someone or groups to another group and it happens with in the society. The unfairness appears whenever when there is miscommunication and wrong information between people.

### **Discrimination**

Robin William states that discrimination may be said to exist to the degree that individuals of a given group who are formally qualified are not treated in conformity with these nominally universal institutionalized codes.

Moreover, Aaron Antonovsky explains discrimination as the effective injurious treatment of persons on grounds rationally irrelevant to the situation or a system of social relations not an isolated individual act.

Discrimination is an unjustified negative or harmful action or behavior of prejudice toward a group of people.

### **Children Working Condition in England in 1830s**

In the 18th century the population growth rate was faster than ever before. There are four primary reasons which may be cited for this growth declining in the death rate, increasing in the birth rate ,good medical facilities and the most significant reasons was that people were consuming healthier diet. In this time a half of the England's people were paupers thanks to the revolution. Therefore most suffered was the farmers because they had to change their job as workers in the mills or factories

England faced the Industrial Revolution. The country did not depend on the agriculture anymore but it changed. The country was run by many industries and factories at that time. This made many workhouse because of Industrial revolution.

*Among other public buildings in a certain town, which for many reasons it will be prudent to refrain from mentioning, and to which I will assign no fictitious name, there is one anciently common to most towns, great or small: to wit, a workhouse; and in this workhouse was born...*

Industrial Revolution happened in England. At this time, the country changed the status from the agricultural country into the Industrial country. The changing statues pushed the country to leave the agriculture and face the machines. Therefore many workhouses were built in the middle of the town.

After Oliver was born he was sent to the workhouse, because it was impossible to take care of a baby in that place, so he was given to the parish to live there for nine years.

*Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception. He was brought up by hand. The hungry and destitute situation of the infant orphan was duly reported by the workhouse authorities to the parish authorities. The parish*

*authorities inquired with dignity of the workhouse authorities, whether there was no female then domiciled in 'the house' who was in a situation to impart to Oliver Twist, the consolation and nourishment of which he stood in need (Dickens,*

After his mother died, Oliver lives with the parish because at the workhouse there were people who could raise him. The condition at the workhouse and the parish were quite the same because the parish also have a workhouse, it was called branch of the workhouse. At this place Oliver had to work therefore he could live. The condition in the workhouse is very pathetic so it is not good for baby like Oliver. The workhouse also usually doesn't have any women to take care the baby so it was better for Oliver to be sent out to the parish house until he was ready to work at the workhouse. In the Industrial Revolution, many workhouses or mills were born. This condition happened because of the changing statues from agricultural country to industrial country. This condition made the workhouse or the mills had to gain many workers. Therefore the owner of the workhouse or mills got the workers from the farmers. Many farmers had to change their job at that time because work in the land did not help them to gain the income anymore. These bad conditions not only happened to them but also to their children.

### **Working Children in the Workhouse in 1830s in *Oliver Twist***

The Industrial revolution was the hard moment for pauper children in England because the country was in the crisis position. This caused many poor people live at that time.

*Although I am not disposed to maintain that the being born in a workhouse, is in itself the most fortunate and enviable circumstance that can possibly befall a human being, I do mean to say that in this particular instance, it was the best thing for Oliver Twist that could by possibility have occurred (Dickens, 1994: 4).*

Because of the hard life, the pauper people did not have any options to do many things. They had to struggle hard to face the crisis moment. The pauper did not have any fortune things at that time. But the pauper baby was fortune enough to be born in the workhouse. The hard life pushed the pauper people to struggle hard to survive in order they could stay alive at the wretched moment.

Oliver was not the only one poor child who suffered at that time. There were many other poor children who had the same destiny like him at the parish's place. They were also treated bad and fed unwell.

*Upon this, the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be 'farmed,' or, in other words, that he should be dispatched to a branch-workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of seven pence-half penny per small head per week (Dickens, 1994:)*

Oliver had to work in the workhouse and mills every day. There were so many workhouse and mills appeared at that time. This condition pushed the mill to gain more workers therefore it pushed the children to work,

In the *Oliver Twist*, there were about twenty to thirty children who worked at the parish's workhouse. The numbers of the worker children in one mill was different from the others. It depended on the adult workers in the workhouse or mills. If there were many parents who worked in the workhouse, there would be also many children who worked at that place because usually the owner of the workhouse or the mills pushed the parents to bring their children in order to work in the workhouse or mills.

### **Social Injustice That Happen to the Children, Their Causes and Effects**

In *Oliver Twist*, the children often get bad treatment from the society, especially children who come from poor family. They got injustice like social inequality, prejudice and discrimination.

The days that must be faced by the children at that time were very hard because they had to get the torture every day in their life. These conditions were very hard for the young children like them. They should get love and good treatment from people around them not the opposite; they got bad treatment from the society.

*...where would be injury and injustice, the suffering, misery, cruelty, and wrong,  
that each day's life brings with it*

The hard life that must be faced by the children at that time was very cruel because they had to face many bad treatments from the people around them. The misery and cruel things were the common treatment for them. And these conditions happened to their life in every day or even in every minute of their life. The suffering was very frequent in their life. There was no justice for them. There were so many inconvenience things that they had to face every day and the environment was allowed them to get all of those harmful things.

### **Social Inequality**

In society, there is always a class or caste groupings that cause the social inequality. Clarified that in most communities there is a gap in the distribution of wealth and other benefits.

Since Oliver was born, he had to face the bad circumstances. He had to face the harmful things around him in order they could survive to life. This condition was also the same like the pauper children when the Industrial Revolution came.. They had to struggle since they were born. They must work at the workhouse or mills at their young age. They had to work hard at that place. they also got many tortures at that place.

### **Social Prejudice**

Social prejudice appears in society because it has the differences one from another. The differences cover the objective differences, the environment differences, the wealth differences, the social status differences, the religious differences and the social norms differences. In the novel *Oliver Twist* it appears that the children at that time got very unfair treatment from the people

who have much money. Children who come from the lower classes are not regarded as a person who should get affection.

When prejudiced feelings or beliefs move into the realm of behavior, the result is discrimination, which denies to individuals or groups equality of treatment<sup>22</sup>). Prejudice is in part the result of discrimination a way of rationalizing and getting rid of guilt feelings that arise when one has treated an individual unfairly

*...and the people began passing to and from. Some few stooped to gaze at Oliver for a moment or two, or turned round to stare at him as they hurried by; but none relieved him*

Oliver was very weak because he did not eat anything. People stared at him because of his condition. He was very dirty. There was no one who wanted to help him or even to give bread to him. At that time, there were so many children who were very suffered because of the Industrial Revolution. An orphan did not have the same right like the other children; they were just assumed to have lowest status in the community and did not deserve to get any attention.

### **Discrimination**

According to the writers in the earlier chapter, discrimination is an unjustified negative or harmful action or behavior of prejudice toward a group of people.

The owner of the workhouse was very cruel at that time. They did not hesitate to do violence to the worker if they tried against the rule in the workhouse. The rules at the workhouse were also very tight at that time. If the children disobeyed it, they would get punishment. And it happened to Oliver after the day he asked for more food. The punishment given to the worker who disobeyed the rules varied. Most of them got physical punishment. This condition was unexpected to Oliver. He did not have any imagination that he would get this kind of punishment, just because sasked for more food.

*For a week after the commission of the impious and profane offence of asking for more, Oliver remained a close prisoner in the dark and solitary room*

The life in the workhouse was very hard because if the children did something wrong. They would get punishment. These all tortures were very cruel for the children who still needed love and caring

### **CONCLUSION**

Industrial Revolution happened in England in 1760s- 1850s. There was changing status from agriculture country to industrial country. The result was that many machines and industries were made in England at this time. The changing status of the country made a big influence to the environment, people and especially to the children. These all condition was reflected in *Oliver Twist*, a story of a young orphan boy who had to face the hard life in The Industrial era. Oliver had to struggle from the bad situations that happened when the Industrial Revolution came.

. He did it because the workhouses needed many workers at that time. At the workhouse, he had to face many bad treatments from the master. Oliver had to work from the morning until night. He only got a little time to rest. He also could not eat enough food. The master gave him and other children light food which only contained single vegetables. This made Oliver very thin, weak and pale. He could not wear appropriate clothes. These all harmful condition had to face by Oliver and the other children at their young age.

Writer concludes that England Revolution bring big impact for the nationwide and in Children's life especially in terms of population, economy, health, and labor. One major development was the changing role of children social life. Generally speaking it can be said that the author reflects on the situation in society and he describes it in his novel. Mainly the poverty and the awfulness of child labor are depicted. As an illustration that children had been apprenticed from their early age. Dickens employed the episode with chimney sweep or the description of the work in workhouses. From the analysis of this paper, it shows that the effects of the England Revolution have really strong connection with the character in the novel, especially children.

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