



A Rigid Dichotomy and Conflict Between Fact and Fancy, and Between Bigotry Religion and Nature: In the Dystopian World of Dicken's Hard Times and Tagore's Achalayatan

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Abstract: Dickens and Tagore have been rebels in their own times. If Dickens was a satirist and rebellion in the Victorian age the Tagore was the rebellion in the Bengal Renaissance period where he raised his voice against the claustrophobic bigotry of religion where there is no love, and compassion towards humanity but rather institutionalized religion was stifling the throats of the human beings. Characters like Panchak and Dadathakur in Achalayatan and Sissy Jupe and her circus party in Hard Times are warriors in front of the typical stereotypical religion and education. The fact-fancy dialectic which embodies Dicken's criticism of the utilitarian system of education and laissez-faire economy has been presented in a symbolic scaffolding. In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, factories increase like the proliferation of skin disease and as a result of this, the color of the industrial towns underwent a sea change. In this age, the industrial towns were extremely shabby and the green countryside experienced the inroads of escalating urbanization. Steam engine worked monstrosly like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy and madness. The factory workers were called not by the name's "hands". Indeed, Dicken's Hard times reveal the monstrous tentacles of acquisition power in general, crushing human fulfillment in its foggy coils. If in Hard times Sissy Jupe is the epitome of color and vitality then in Achalayatan it is Panchak and DadaThakur. This paper proves how education can only be fruitful if it is enjoyed with imagination, color, vitality, and with the beauty and serenity of nature and not to be within the walls of stifling religion and facts that would ultimately lead to the petrification of the mind.

Keywords- Fact, petrification of mind, Fancy, religious bigotry, Industrial Revolution.

The Victorian age was an age of flux and bafflement after the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species. It opened new vistas of philosophy, a new perspective of the industrial world that ushered a precedented difficulty for the common man to live in England. A new voice rose – the voice of the capitalist who made new laws, and new rules that stifled the lives of the common people. His novels became the mirror that reflected the snobbishness and affectation of the upper class and the tyranny, and poverty of the poor people. Dicken's Hard Times throws light on two perspectives of society- one of the students and another of the factory life. Dickens has been both a satirist and a realist. On one hand, he throws light on the

factory workers who were forced to work for long hours and lead their life on low wages. On the other hand, Dickens was very sympathetic towards the sorrows and sufferings of the children of his times. The schools were managed by private hands, their studies were limited to facts and they were mercilessly beaten. Dickens “is the romancer of London life, and his romances are founded on reality” (Hugh Walker) made *Hard Times* to expose the frailties and follies of the Victorian age.

David Cecil has rightly appreciated Dicken’s

.....his novels have their universal application. Dicken’s gospel is crude but it is not slight or shallow. The truth it enshrines is a universal truth. In every country, in every walk of life, human beings feel the beauty of the primary generousities, and the evil produced by their absence. So that in every country, every walk of life Dickens strikes a responsive chord in the heart of mankind.....the English, the kindly, individualistic, illogical, sentimental English, is more than any other people, touched by impulsive benevolence, instinctive good nature set a value on homely satisfaction.....no other novelists have given their heart. (63).

In Indian literature, Rabindranath Tagore emerged as a rebel protesting against the evil social customs that were deeply rooted in the culture at that time. Tagore vehemently protested against religious bigotry, fanaticism, and worn, torn-out evil practices. His *Achalayatan* protested against institutionalized religion where that negates and divides human beings into classes, caste, and color and removes man far away from nature-that is created by Omnipotent God. God is not enclosed in any particular text or temple or religious manuscript but rather he is present in every animal, every human being, and every living being. True religion follows the path of uprightness, compassion, and love. The crux of his notion of religion is carried forward by Panchak and Dadathakur.

Dicken’s *Hard times* are typically divided into three sections- “sowing”, “reaping”, and “garnering” that introduces Thomas Gradgrind’s law of education

Now, what I want are Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts are alone wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, Sir!”. (*Hard times*,1).

Thomas Gradgrind is the owner of the experimental private school in Coketown. He insists on teaching “Facts” and feels that fancy and imagination are of no use. His children are models of his principle and they are never allowed to learn humanities, sentiments, nursery rhymes, and fairy tales. Dickens demonstrates the crisis; the Victorian education institutions had faced owing to maddening fact-orientation. Encouraged by Benthamite philosophy, the educationists of the time took pains to reduce

everything to statistical measurable data. The name of the house is “Stone henge” where no little Gradgrind is ever heard to utter” twinkle twinkle little star: how I wonder what you are!” (Hard Times,13). The dramatic situation comes when Mr. Grangrind finds his children-Louisa and tom peeping” through a loophole” and enjoying the circus. Louisa complains that she is tired of something but Gradgrind doesn’t understand what. Both of them are admonished for peeping into the circus show which amounts to the inculcation of fancy. The statistical figure also degrades the workers with numbers

So many Hundred hands in the mill. So many Hundred horse steam power. (Hard times 28).

The business philosophy of laissez-faire proposed and practiced by the Victorian Utilitarianan economists brought about a dystopia of dehumanization. Mr. Bounderby the industrialist and “the bully of humanity” has pensioned off his mother, Mrs. Peglar on thirty pounds a year. His condition is that She should never tell others how affectionally she reared up her Josiah and let him aggressively make a virtue of his low parentage. Coketown is the town of industrialists like Mr. Bounderby for whom “smoke is healthy”. Stephen Blackpool the trade worker is another victim of this rigid system. For him everything is “a muddle.... the sooner I am dead, the better”. (38)

Another strikingly evil portraiture of evil is Mrs. Sparsit, a woman having high aristocratic connections related to Powlers and Scanners. This woman with a “Carolinian eyebrow” (42) and a “Roman nose” (42) has a highly bloated ego that her condescendingly about her employer a self-made millionaire. She shares her employer’s contempt for the suffering and miserable workers: she feels too high to sympathize with Stephen’s marital brawl. Mrs. Sparsit's initial ambition was to her status from housekeeper to housewife and when Bounderby with a tremulous heart and a bottle of smelling salt in his packet dilutes to marry Louisa, the readers are astonished to see how coolly Mrs. Sparsit accepts news and wishes Bounderby happiness in marriage. But in her heart of hearts, she knows she knows that happiness with Louisa is impossible and is determined to pity Bounderby as a victim. Even after a year of the marriage Mrs. sparsit never released him from her determined pity, a situation, she even strongly believes unmask her hypocrisy. She shades grace and feminine aristocracy to the bank

Seated with her needlework.... she had a self-laudatory sense of connection between her lady-like deportment, and the rude business aspects of the place. (67).

She considers herself the “bank-fairy” while she is popularly recognized as the “bank dragon”. She is shrewd enough to elicit information from her stooge, Bitzer. Her hypocrisy is rampantly evident when she would unholily gather information about Tom’s disintegration of character. Her hypocrisy and her jealousy reach the apex when she spies on Louisa like a hawk and finds her illicit relationship. She fools herself by bringing Mrs. Peglar in front of everyone that in turn exposes Bounderby’s ill-treatment toward his mother.

At last, she is forced to leave her mentor. Dickens beautifully portrays the evil with the confused sympathetic victim of Gradgrind's "facts" Louisa – his daughter.

Of all the victims of Gradgrind 's system of education, Louisa is the most potentially tragic. Dickens begins from childhood and the novel ends with her youth in a pathetic picture of heart and imagination. The flowers that would have bloomed in her withered away before the buds could blossom. Louisa 's story is of starvation of imagination and the consequent disasters that are associated with it. Her Childhood is presented in the most moving terms where Dickens shows how the fact-oriented curriculum pulverized the child's world in her. Gradgrind brings 's strictest prescriptions relating to the absolute annihilation of the faculty of imagination his thunderous instruction to never under and his blustering dictates to strict facts and train her intellectual faculties with all sorts of logical data ruined the pleasure of childhood to her. A yellow flower was a yellow flower a man was a man a tree was a tree, a horse was a quadruped, gaminivorous-this colorless, emotionless, joyless unfulfilled deprived of the heaven that a child creates in her mind. And with her adolescence, the persecution deepened for not only was she allowed to powder her wonder of the wisdom of the heart and the ennobling joys of the new growing sense of love in the hands of Mr. Bounderby. Her pitiful state is shown when Mr. Bounderby forces a kiss on her and she rubs it hard. Tom says "you will rub a hole in your face ". Louisa answers the most pitiful imaginable from a girl of her age" You will cut the piece out your penknife if you like "(18). It is probably the greatest irony of fate that Gradgrind puts the last nail in her coffin when he arranges her marriage as a tenable fact with this same Bounderby Louisa revolts with all the power in her soul and with greatest of irony and contempt and questions-

Father, said Louis do you think that I love Mr. Bounderby Father...does Mr. Bounderby ask me to love him (56.)

Gradgrind the immensely practical statistician is not bothered about the question of love at all and failing to fathom the depths of her anguish, simply advises her "to take into the statistics of marriage and points that large proportion of these marriages is contracted between parties of very unequal ages and these marriages do take place. For Gradgrind Louisa should not question herself about the possibility of love. For him "the sole remaining question "shall I marry him. She revolts against her father and says

What other proposal can have been made to me? What are my heart's experiences...? What have I done, father of tastes and fancies of aspirations and affections.....

She again cries out, and blames Mr. Gradgrind:

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 have you done o father, what have you done with the garden that should have bloomed once in the great wilderness?" (87).

Fr Leavis calls it highly poetic and states "by texture, imagination made symbolic method and the resulting concentration Hard times he thinks is pact with formally poetic work (the Great Tradition 4). Louisa's tragedy is full in a circle when Tom at the end of the novel behaves most ungratefully and forgets to return love and affection to her. If tragedy is the result of a sense of waste Louisa perfectly befits her role in a drama of pain.

The "Facts" world of Gradgrind's is shaken by the colorful world of "fancy" i.e. the circus party. In the great Tradition, FR Leavis has justifiably pointed out that one of the reasons behind the aesthetic subtlety of Hard times as a novel is the presence of the circus people episode

These uncouth and unsophisticated groups minus money and facts stand as an emblem of humanity, camaraderie, and selfless impersonal love. They bring into sharp focus lacuna of the fact hurtless" (15). The circus life s not at all glamorous rather they live in a shabby quarter, they are deprived of education, and even are not capable of speaking sophisticated languages. The description of Mr. Sleary is a bit comical that raises bubbles of fun among the readers

A stout with one fixed eye and one eye, a voice like the efforts of a broken old pair of bellows a flabby surface and a muddled head which was never sober and never drunk. (32).

Sissy Jupe is another unique creation of dickens who also brings life to the barren world of Gradgrind. It is Mr. Sleary who distinguishes man from machines

People must be amused. They can't be always working not yet they can be always learning (90).

If in Hard times Mr. Gradgrind has built a private institution on "Facts", then in Tagore's play Achalayatan is another rigid, institution that is only ruled by typical religious hymns, chants, and mantras and not with love and compassion towards the human beings. The play is an indictment of the ruthless and cynical religious practices that demolish the inner soul of human beings. The play begins with a song being sung by Panchak

No one knows you called me at early Dawn

No one believes I cry to myself

Look at the Faces Around

The way You do. (1)

But he is being interrupted and scolded by brother Mahapanchak

Singing again? How dare you? (1).

The coming of Guru to this Achalayatan is the topic of anxiety between students and teachers. Everyone is excited to know about Guru. The play shows a lot of conflicting faiths between the barren petrified Achalayatan and the hardworking and low-born Sonpangshus.

A little boy Subhadra sins by opening the window in the North and gazing outside and enjoying the beautiful world. He is Scared and asks Panchak for a penance. Panchak humorously digs fun at the religious belief

I can't recall. There are twenty or twenty-five thousand forms of penances. (12).

Other boys are terrified of such an incident. They feel that it is heinous crime. The religious sins are so full to the brim that Acharya the head of the institution says that "Sometimes I fear that he is coming because we are overfilled with sin" (20). While Achalayatan is forbidden from opening the windows, the Sonpangshus enjoy the freedom and have a great reverence towards Dadathakur or their Guru. Achalayatan forbids Sonpangshus from entering their institution. The children of the petrified are forbidden from mixing with them. They are considered to be low-born and untouchables and not worthy to be mixed with. Dadathakur criticizes being superstitious and being Caged birds

A bird born in a cage fears the sky most. The metal bars of the cage give it pain yet if the door is opened for it, its heart throbs in fear. It thinks how shall I live if I am not caged? We have not let ourselves go without fear. That's our age-old Habit (47).

The climax of the play comes when Dadathakur comes as a warrior and breaks the walls of Achalayatan. It is revealed that he is the Guru for whom everyone was waiting so long. Dadathakur brings life and soul to the barren land and promises everyone

Make the white foundation of the new sky-scraping edifice stand in the light of the sky. The two groups must join and make Achalatan a true institution.

If the circus party was the savior in the Novel *Hard times* then in Tagore's play *Guru* is the savior in the *Achalayatan*.

Hippolyte Taine comments on the two classes present in *Hard times*

He contrasts souls which nature and people who have none..... He attacks education built on statistics, figures, and facts overwhelm the positive and mercantile spirit with misfortune and ridicule, combats pride, hardness, and selfishness of the merchant and the aristocrat.....he satirizes the oppressive society, praises oppressed nature, and his elegiac genius, like his satirical genius, finds ready to his hand in the English world around him, the sphere which it needs for its development. (381).

Train's comment applies to both the Benthamites and the authority holders of *Achalayatan*.

Thus both the novels might appear a moral fable but Dickens and Tagore's satire might be a little harsh and not a gimmick to increase its popularity of readership but rather the benign generosity, silent kindness, love, and compassion of the Circus party in *Hard times* and Tagore's *Panchak* and *Guru* in *Achalayatan* teaches the humanity to be kind, manifests selfless love and transforms the barren darkness of the Benthamite Utilitarian's and the Petrified land (*Achalayatan*) of illusion and immobility.

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