



Issues Of Social Outcast & Exclusion In Victorian Era With Special Reference To The Character Of Pip In *Great Expectations* By Charles Dickens – A Study Echoes Of Exclusion: Pip's Victorian Odyssey

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Abstract: This paper is aimed to explore the intricate theme of social alienation and redemption within the Victorian context, with a primary focus on the character of Pip in Charles Dickens' acclaimed novel, "Great Expectations." Through a comprehensive analysis of Pip's evolution from a marginalized orphan to a conflicted beneficiary of unexpected fortune, this study aims to elucidate the multifaceted dynamics of social exclusion, identity formation, and moral redemption prevalent in Victorian society. By employing literary criticism and historical context, the paper explores how Pip navigates the rigid class boundaries and societal norms of Victorian England, grappling with feelings of inferiority, aspiration, and moral ambiguity. Dickens' portrayal of Pip's interactions with characters from diverse social strata, such as the enigmatic Miss Havisham and the working-class Joe Gargery, serves as a lens through which to examine the complexities of social hierarchy and individual agency. Furthermore, this research delves into the transformative journey of Pip as he confronts the consequences of his desires for social advancement and grapples with the ethical implications of his actions. Through close analysis of key moments in the narrative, including Pip's moral awakening and reconciliation with his past, the paper explores themes of repentance, forgiveness, and the pursuit of authentic selfhood. By contextualizing Pip's experiences within the broader socio-economic landscape of Victorian England, this study sheds light on the pervasive issues of social inequality, alienation, and the quest for belonging that continue to resonate with contemporary audiences. Through a nuanced examination of Pip's character arc, this research underscores the enduring relevance of Dickens' exploration of human frailty, resilience, and the possibility of redemption in the face of societal injustice and personal shortcomings.

Key words – Victorian Era, Exclusion, Social Outcast, Great Expectations, Charles Dickens

I. INTRODUCTION

The Victorian era stands as a pivotal period in British history, characterized by rapid industrialization, burgeoning wealth, and profound social upheaval. Against the backdrop of this transformative era, Charles Dickens' novel "Great Expectations" offers a penetrating exploration of the complexities of social exclusion and its enduring repercussions on individual lives. Set amidst the stratified society of Victorian England, Dickens masterfully portrays the struggles of characters like Pip, whose experiences illuminate the pervasive injustices and moral ambiguities inherent in a society sharply divided along class lines.

During the Victorian era, Britain underwent unprecedented economic growth and urbanization, leading to the emergence of a starkly divided social hierarchy. At the summit of this hierarchy were the affluent aristocracy and industrial magnates, whose wealth and privilege conferred upon them immense power and influence. Conversely, the lower classes, comprising labourers, artisans, and the destitute, faced systemic marginalization and disenfranchisement, relegated to the periphery of society with limited opportunities for upward mobility.

Against this backdrop, social exclusion manifested in myriad forms, permeating every facet of Victorian life. From the squalid conditions of the urban slums to the rigid etiquette of high society, barriers based on class, gender, and economic status reinforced divisions and perpetuated inequality. Individuals deemed socially undesirable or economically disadvantaged found themselves ostracized, their voices silenced amidst the clamour of progress and prosperity.

In "Great Expectations," Dickens skilfully navigates this intricate social landscape, offering a compelling portrayal of one man's quest for self-realization amidst the constraints of societal expectations. The protagonist, Pip, epitomizes the archetype of the social outcast, born into poverty and orphaned at an early age. Through Pip's eyes, readers are afforded a glimpse into the harsh realities of Victorian society, where one's worth is often determined by birth right rather than merit.

As Pip embarks on his journey of self-discovery, he encounters a diverse array of characters, each emblematic of different strata within Victorian society. From the eccentric Miss Havisham to the humble blacksmith Joe Gargery, these characters serve as mirrors reflecting the complexities of social interaction and the pervasive influence of class dynamics. Pip's ascent from the marshes of Kent to the opulent environs of London parallels his quest for social acceptance and validation, underscoring the potent allure of wealth and status in Victorian England.

In this study, we delve deeper into the themes of social exclusion and marginalization as depicted in "Great Expectations," with a particular emphasis on the character of Pip. By situating Dickens' narrative within its historical context, we aim to unravel the intricacies of Victorian society and shed light on the enduring relevance of its social dynamics. Through a nuanced analysis of Pip's trajectory, we seek to illuminate the profound impact of social exclusion on individual identity and the quest for belonging in a world defined by rigid hierarchies and entrenched inequalities.

II. OUTLINE AND MAJOR CHARACTERS OF NOVEL

"Great Expectations" by Charles Dickens follows the transformative journey of Pip, an orphan living in rural Kent, whose encounter with the convict Magwitch sets in motion a series of events that lead him from poverty to wealth and back again. As Pip navigates the complexities of Victorian society, he becomes infatuated with Estella, the adopted daughter of the wealthy and vengeful Miss Havisham, and is driven by his desire to rise above his humble origins. However, his pursuit of gentility in London brings moral conflicts and disillusionment, particularly when he discovers that his mysterious benefactor is none other than Magwitch, the convict he once helped. Through trials of love, betrayal, and self-discovery, Pip learns the true value of loyalty and compassion, ultimately finding redemption in reconciling with his past and embracing the humble roots he had once sought to escape. Alongside memorable characters like Miss Havisham, whose frozen existence symbolizes the consequences of bitterness and revenge, and Joe Gargery, whose unwavering kindness serves as a moral compass for Pip, Dickens weaves a rich tapestry of social commentary and human emotion, exploring themes of ambition, identity, and the pursuit of moral integrity amidst the rigid class structures of Victorian England.

III.SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND OUTCASTES

The word outcaste means as per Cambridge Dictionary website “a person who has no place in their society or in a particular group, because the society or group refuses to accept them:” showing its Synonym. In the context of the Victorian era in England, social outcast and exclusion refer to the systematic marginalization and ostracization of individuals or groups from mainstream society based on various factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, or economic status. During this period, British society was characterized by rigid hierarchical structures, where one's social standing was largely determined by birth right and wealth, creating stark divisions between the privileged elite and the disenfranchised underclass. Social outcasts were those who fell outside the accepted norms of Victorian society, often facing discrimination, prejudice, and limited opportunities for advancement. This could include impoverished individuals, such as orphans and paupers, who lacked the means to secure a respectable livelihood, as well as marginalized groups like women, minorities, and those deemed morally or socially deviant by prevailing Victorian morality. Factors such as poverty, illness, disability, or criminality could contribute to social exclusion, leading to social isolation, economic hardship, and psychological distress for those affected. The Victorian era was marked by both philanthropic efforts to address social issues and entrenched attitudes of paternalism and moral judgment towards the less fortunate, reflecting a complex interplay of compassion and social control within Victorian society. Consequently, the theme of social outcast and exclusion serves as a lens through which to explore the tensions between tradition and progress, compassion and indifference, in Victorian England, shedding light on the enduring struggles of marginalized individuals striving for dignity, equality, and inclusion in society.

In "Great Expectations," Charles Dickens vividly portrays the theme of social outcast and exclusion through the experiences of several characters. Firstly, the protagonist Pip embodies the struggles of a lower-class orphan striving for acceptance in a society dominated by class distinctions. His humble origins and lack of social standing mark him as an outsider in the affluent circles he aspires to join, highlighting the barriers faced by those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Similarly, Magwitch, the convict who becomes Pip's secret benefactor, is marginalized by his criminal past, condemned to a life of poverty and stigma despite his genuine acts of kindness towards Pip. Additionally, characters like Miss Havisham and Estella are trapped in their own self-imposed isolation, consumed by bitterness and resentment, which ultimately alienates them from genuine human connection. Through these examples, Dickens illuminates the pervasive effects of social exclusion and the corrosive impact of societal judgments and prejudices on individuals' lives in Victorian England.

IV. PIP: NAVIGATING SOCIAL OUTCAST AND ASPIRING FOR ACCEPTANCE

The Struggles of Pip as a Social Outcast: In "Great Expectations," Pip's journey begins in the desolate marshes of Kent, where he encounters the convict Magwitch. This encounter marks the inception of Pip's internal conflict as he grapples with feelings of fear, guilt, and moral ambiguity. Despite his innate compassion towards Magwitch, Pip is acutely aware of the social stigma attached to associating with a convict, reflecting the pervasive judgment and ostracization prevalent in Victorian society. Furthermore, Pip's humble upbringing as an orphan living with his harsh sister and her kindly husband, Joe Gargery, underscores his status as a social outcast. His lack of pedigree and financial means sets him apart from the genteel society he aspires to join, positioning him on the margins of society. As Pip embarks on his quest for social advancement, he encounters various obstacles that highlight the entrenched barriers to upward mobility faced by individuals of lower social standing. For instance, his infatuation with Estella, the adopted daughter of the wealthy Miss Havisham, serves as a constant reminder of the vast chasm separating him from the world of privilege and prestige.

Pip's Pursuit of Social Acceptance and Identity: As Pip's fortunes change with the revelation of his "great expectations" from an anonymous benefactor; he undergoes a transformation that mirrors the complexities of Victorian social mobility. Moving to London to pursue his newfound wealth and status, Pip immerses himself in the trappings of high society, adopting manners and aspirations befitting a gentleman. However, his elevation in social status only serves to deepen his inner turmoil as he grapples with feelings of inadequacy and moral conflict. Dickens illustrates Pip's internal struggle through his interactions with characters like Herbert Pocket and Jaggers, who represent different facets of Victorian society. Despite his efforts to assimilate into the upper echelons of society, Pip remains haunted by his humble origins and the spectre of Magwitch's criminal past, which threatens to unravel the fragile facade of his newfound identity.

Moreover, his estrangement from Joe and Bidley, his loyal friends from his childhood, underscores the isolating effects of social ambition and the erosion of genuine human connection in pursuit of societal validation.

Redemption and Self-Realization: In the final stages of the novel, Pip undergoes a profound moral awakening as he confronts the consequences of his actions and the true nature of his aspirations. The revelation of Magwitch's identity as his benefactor shatters Pip's illusions of gentility and forces him to confront the ethical implications of his desires for social advancement. Through his selfless efforts to protect Magwitch from the law and his eventual capture, Pip comes to recognize the inherent worth of human compassion and the folly of his past ambitions. Moreover, his reconciliation with Joe and Bidley, and his acceptance of his humble roots, signify a transformative journey towards self-realization and moral integrity. Dickens masterfully concludes the novel with Pip's poignant reunion with Estella, wherein he acknowledges the futility of his romantic illusions and embraces the possibility of a more authentic and meaningful connection based on mutual understanding and forgiveness. In this way, "Great Expectations" encapsulates the enduring themes of redemption, forgiveness, and the quest for self-discovery amidst the tumultuous currents of Victorian society.

V. MAGWITCH: A PORTRAIT OF REDEMPTION AMIDST SOCIAL STIGMA

The Complexities of Magwitch's Character: In "Great Expectations," Magwitch emerges as a multifaceted character whose presence reverberates throughout the narrative, challenging conventional notions of social stigma and redemption. Initially introduced as a fearsome convict encountered by the young Pip in the marshes, Magwitch's characterization undergoes a gradual transformation as his backstory is unveiled. Despite his criminal past and rough exterior, Magwitch reveals himself to be a complex figure driven by a profound sense of loyalty and paternal affection towards Pip. His decision to secretly act as Pip's benefactor, bestowing upon him the means to pursue a gentlemanly existence, underscores the depths of his altruism and the complexities of human morality. Moreover, Magwitch's vulnerability and humanity are further highlighted through his interactions with other characters, such as his tender reunion with the faithful Herbert Pocket, which offers glimpses into his longing for connection and redemption amidst the harsh realities of his past.

Magwitch's Journey of Redemption: Throughout the novel, Magwitch embarks on a journey of redemption characterized by acts of selflessness and sacrifice, which stand in stark contrast to his criminal reputation. His unwavering devotion to Pip, despite the societal barriers that separate them, serves as a testament to the transformative power of love and compassion. For instance, Magwitch's heartfelt gratitude towards Pip for showing him kindness in his moment of need is poignantly conveyed in his declaration, "You acted noble, my boy," underscoring the profound impact of Pip's simple act of compassion on Magwitch's life. Moreover, Magwitch's fervent desire to see Pip succeed and his willingness to risk his own safety to ensure his welfare exemplify his capacity for selfless devotion and paternal love. Dickens portrays Magwitch's redemption not as a mere absolution of his past crimes but as a profound journey of self-discovery and moral awakening, wherein he finds solace and redemption through his unconditional love for Pip.

The Legacy of Magwitch's Redemption: In the final stages of the novel, Magwitch's redemption reaches its culmination as he faces his ultimate fate with dignity and courage. Despite the tragic circumstances of his death, Magwitch's legacy endures as a testament to the transformative power of redemption and the inherent worth of human compassion. His selfless sacrifice for Pip's sake embodies the novel's central themes of forgiveness, redemption, and the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. Furthermore, Magwitch's legacy extends beyond his individual story to encompass broader themes of social justice and empathy, challenging the prevailing attitudes of Victorian society towards the marginalized and downtrodden. Through Magwitch's character, Dickens offers a powerful critique of the social prejudices and injustices of his time, while also celebrating the capacity for human resilience, compassion, and redemption in the face of adversity. In this way, Magwitch emerges as a compelling embodiment of the enduring struggle for dignity, acceptance, and redemption amidst the harsh realities of Victorian England.

VI. ESTELLA: A PORTRAIT OF SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

The Confluence of Nature and Nurture in Estella's Character: Estella, the enigmatic and captivating character in Charles Dickens' "Great Expectations," embodies the collision between societal expectations, personal identity, and the ramifications of social exclusion. Adopted and raised by the vengeful Miss Havisham, Estella is groomed from a young age to embody the embodiment of heartlessness and detachment, destined to wreak havoc on the hearts of men. Her upbringing in Satis House, frozen in time by Miss Havisham's bitterness and resentment, shapes Estella into a cold and aloof figure, insulated from the warmth and compassion of genuine human connection. However, beneath Estella's veneer of icy beauty lies a complex inner world fraught with conflicting emotions and desires, shaped in part by her social isolation. Her interactions with Pip, marked by both cruelty and tenderness, highlight the tension between her learned behaviour and innate humanity. Despite her efforts to conform to Miss Havisham's vision of her as a heartless seductress, Estella's moments of vulnerability and introspection reveal the struggle to reconcile her true self with the expectations imposed upon her by society.

The Paradox of Estella's Identity: Estella's identity is intricately bound up with the paradox of her existence as both a victim and a perpetrator of societal expectations and social exclusion. Raised to believe in the superiority of her beauty and social standing, Estella internalizes the role assigned to her by Miss Havisham, viewing herself as a mere pawn in the older woman's vengeful game. Her rejection of Pip's affections and her disdain towards him reflect her internalized belief in her own superiority and his unworthiness, a belief further reinforced by the societal norms that dictate their interactions. However, beneath Estella's façade of indifference lies a deep-seated longing for genuine emotional connection and fulfilment, a desire stifled by her isolation and the societal pressures placed upon her. Her admission to Pip that she has "no heart" belies the emotional turmoil simmering beneath the surface, hinting at the internal conflict between her learned behaviour and her innate desire for love and belonging, desires that have been denied to her due to her status as an outsider in society. Estella's inability to fully embrace her true self is reflected in her tumultuous relationship with Pip, wherein she vacillates between cruel rejection and moments of genuine affection, highlighting the struggle to break free from the constraints of societal expectations and forge her own path while navigating the barriers of social exclusion.

Estella's Journey of Self-Discovery and Redemption: As the narrative unfolds, Estella undergoes a gradual process of self-discovery and redemption, navigating the complexities of social exclusion and societal expectations. Her reunion with Pip in the novel's closing chapters marks a pivotal moment of introspection and transformation, wherein she acknowledges the futility of her previous pursuits and embraces the possibility of genuine emotional connection. Estella's admission to Pip that she has been "hard and unyielding" underscores her newfound awareness of the limitations of her previous behaviour and her desire for redemption, a redemption that extends beyond her personal journey to encompass the societal structures that have contributed to her isolation and suffering. Moreover, her vulnerability in expressing her longing for a second chance at love with Pip reflects her growth as a character and her willingness to break free from the shackles of her past, symbolizing the triumph of human resilience and the enduring hope for redemption and self-discovery amidst the complexities of social exclusion and societal expectations.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Charles Dickens' "Great Expectations" offers a profound exploration of the pernicious effects of social exclusion and the plight of societal outcasts within the rigid class structures of Victorian England. Through the intricate character arcs of individuals like Pip, Magwitch, and Estella, Dickens exposes the harsh realities faced by those marginalized by birth, circumstance, or societal judgment. The novel serves as a scathing critique of the entrenched inequalities and moral hypocrisies that perpetuated the cycle of poverty, alienation, and despair for the most vulnerable members of society. Despite the characters' varied journeys and resolutions, the pervasive menace of social exclusion looms large, casting a shadow over their lives and relationships. Dickens' portrayal of the human toll exacted by societal prejudice and indifference serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring need for empathy, compassion, and social reform. Through "Great Expectations," Dickens urges readers to confront the injustices of their own time and strive for a more equitable society, one in which the inherent dignity and worth of every individual are recognized and respected, regardless of their social standing or background.

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