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Detailed Analysis Of The Selected Novels As Great Examples Of The Victorian Era With Specific References To The Selected Texts.

Nikhat Shaikh Irfan

MA English

Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune

Abstract: The paper attempts to explore and understand two of the most famous novels of the Victorian era and their ability to represent the reality of the era. The selected novels are *Hard Times* (1854) by Charles Dickens and *Jude The Obscure* (1895) by Thomas Hardy. The paper attempts to use the writings and the ideas of both authors, for instance, Charles Dickens's satire and sharp social commentary and the pessimist view of Thomas Hardy, to try and indicate how well their writings, ideas and themes blend to develop the elements that add a certain kind of perspective to the reader's understanding of the Victorian era. The paper contains a detailed analysis and numerous quotes (including the chapters and page numbers) from both novels which will further contribute to the in-depth study of these novels. Considering the study done in this paper the selected novels do justify the hypothesis of this paper as well as the title of being two of the greatest novels of the times.

- ❖ Detailed analysis of 'Hard Times' by Charles Dickens and 'Jude The Obscure' by Thomas Hardy as examples of Victorian Literature with specific references to the text.

The Victorian age is known for its moral value and the Industrial Revolution - things that led to child labour, crowded slums, and diseases which, further, gave rise to - 'class divisions' and so came into existence the 'middle class' and their struggles among classes such as upper class and lower class, further leading to an unbalanced political and social structure. Industrialization made people come up with economic theories like *laissez-faire* which said that capitalistic self-interest was the most important law of social action. Movement like Utilitarianism whose essence was practicality: "There is no such thing as moral or immoral action; everything is either useful or not useful." very similar to characters like Mr. Gradgrind - the man of facts, or Mr. Bounderby from *Hard Times*.

When we focus on the Literature of the Victorian Era, novels were in trend especially serialized novels and had one major purpose and that was to show the reality to the society, to bring attention to the underlying

political and social issues as well as the common people. Writers like Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, and William Thackeray did excellent work when it came to novels. Satiric tones were commonly used. Other than Novels - poetry, and essays were also given huge importance. So, even if the era is said to be one of the most prosperous eras in history, there was also a sad side of the era that the people of England were experiencing. The introduction to the newness became the reason for people's shaken beliefs leading to doubts and uncertainty of the concrete. Even though the country was ruled by a woman, the women of the country were still questioning their existence and the double standard of the dominant society. With tremendous progress and restrictions, the Victorian Age became less human and more materialistic and fact-based. With the help of novels like *Hard Times* and *Jude The Obscure*, the reader gets a clear picture of the things going on below the surface of the development and progress of the Victorian Era.

"Can a man have no soul of his own, no mind of his own?" (*Hard Times*, Book the third, ch.4. Lost pg 271)

The novel, written in 1854, *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens satirises the laissez-faire system. It lays bare the wide gap between the rich and the poor. If we look at the early life of the author, we'll see that the author belonged to a poor class family, due to his father's imprisonment he was forced to leave school and work at a factory. Later he received little formal education, he taught himself shorthand and became a reporter. So, one can say that his novels are written with experience and not just with imagination. In the same way, the novel, '*Jude The Obscure*', written by the late Victorian novelist Thomas Hardy is another masterpiece that throws light on the double standards and values as well as the rights of women of the Victorian era. Again, like Charles Dickens's novels, this novel also draws parallels with Hardy's own life. One of the most unique things about his novels and poems is that they are set in a fictional town called Wessex - very much like the Indian author R.K. Narayan's fictional town Malgudi. This last novel '*Jude The Obscure*' by Thomas Hardy received such harsh criticism and negative reviews to a level that he claimed, it silenced him as a novelist but it also showed the cruel dominance of society.

Society has always been selfish. Talking of Victorian society it wasn't any different. The novels mentioned above, flawlessly, bring light to the hypocrisy and double standard of society, particularly towards the powerless, poor, and women. First of all, there was no such thing as privacy, whatever happened in a person's private life was discussed in society and even at the workplace. The invasion of privacy by society is expressed through the characters of the novel *Jude the Obscure*. Not only Jude and Sue are the ones who

get judged at work for their way of living but Mr. Phillotson, too, gets expelled from his teaching position for letting go of Sue (his wife) to live with her lover Jude. It is even said by Mr. Phillotson - 'I won't. *It is no business of theirs. It....like*' (At Shaston, Ch.6 pg. 259). In fact, gender roles were controlled by society. Women were limited to domestic laws and were expected to be attractive but also protect their chastity (just like Belinda in Pope's the rape of the Lock) and should get married as soon as possible, the character of Arabella from Jude The Obscure shows the desperateness of getting married in that time whereas men were expected to be successful and be able to feed their family. The institution of marriage, religion and class played a very important role in structuring the society of the time. In the novel, Hard Times, when the mill worker - Stephen Blackpool asks for help from Mr. Bounderby (mill owner and a man devoid of sentiments) to advise him on a way out of his unhappy marriage, Bounderby not only stops him from taking a divorce (which was considered a sin, religiously) but also accuses him of having ideas above his station. (Ch.11 No way out, pg. 86). In Jude The Obscure, the letter from a college professor named T. Tetuphenay telling Jude to remain in his own sphere (showing him his class) (At Christminster ch.6 pg 120) or when Jude visits this professional musician to appreciate his work, the musician talks to him with interest until *he finds that Jude was a poor man, his manner changed to the opposite* (At Melchester ch.10 pg. 204)

"I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books." - Sue Bridehead

There was no place for romance, one would marry to be settled for society's and religion's sake. *The Victorians denied that women possess sexual feelings or any desire*, marriage was just a contract on a page signed by two people. A character like Sue who owned her sexuality confidently was considered an outcast for her choices and opinions in the times where for *'private lessons some article in the code made it necessary that a respectable, elderly woman should be present at these lessons when the teacher and the taught were of different sexes.'* (At Christminster, ch. 107 pg. 104). A woman must marry a man. But if the woman has a lover or she is unmarried for a long time was subjected to losing all her respect in society like this another character Louisa from Hard Times, who gets accused of having an affair and is instantly defamed which leads to the end of her marriage with Bounderby. (Ch.3 Very Decided, pg. 262-264)

In the novel, Jude the Obscure there are few elements of Modernist literature. The novel is definitely way ahead of its time. So, for Victorians, the novel was strange and blasphemous since the novel criticizes marriage and religion which were the core values of the time. Like modernist literature, it does show life as

absurd. Jude and Sue are ultimately themselves, Jude having a tender heart while Sue is a very smart and intelligent girl or Arabella being a cunning and heartless woman, (the reversal of gender roles), though things change at the end due to the trauma they face for being themselves. Them breaking free of old traditions and talking about individuality which is evident in the dialogue said by Sue - '*I can't bear that they, and everybody, should think people wicked because they may have chosen to live their own way!*' (At Albrickham and elsewhere Ch.6, pg 318)

In conclusion, both novels are certainly great examples of the Victorian age. Having their individual differences in like themes they still, together, successfully show the harsh realities of the Victorian era. While *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens highlights the destruction caused by focusing only on facts, *Jude the Obscure* makes the reader think and provokes a sense of rebellion against society and its politics.

"There is some external to us which says, "You shan't!" First, it said, "You shan't learn!" Then it said, "You shan't labour!" Now it says, "You shan't love!"

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