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# **OLIVER TWIST BY CHARLES DICKENS: UNSNARLING THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY IN SOCIAL CONTEXT**

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**Abstract:** The novel “Oliver Twist” by Charles Dickens can be seen as a sociological novel, which shows the hazardous development of a Victorian agrarian society turning into an industrialized society. During the Victorian era England evidenced a humongous development in science and technology, which led to the rapid growth in industries and urbanization. As everything comes with its own price, the people of Victorian society had suffer due to the evils of industrialization and urbanization. As evident in the novel prostitution became rampant, and that led lot of other problems of morality being questioned but the society itself was leading a hypocritical life. Oliver Twist, the main protagonist of the novel, the young orphan boy had to face the wrath of poor societal norms and laws. At very young age he had to bear the brunt of the miseries, he works as weaver in the okaum industry, he works as a chimney sweeper, a mourner at children, as a apprentice under Mr. Sowerberry but finally ends up in the hands of Fagin, who trains him to be juvenile, making him a pickpocket. Even after all the atrocities by the society Oliver ends up being a good human being with values hence, this paper is an attempt to show the darker side of the Victorian society.

**Keywords:** Atrocities, Juvenile, Industrialization Victorian Era, Urbanization.

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**Introduction:** The novels by Charles Dickens always can be analyzed in the sociological perspective, be it “Pickwick Papers” or “Oliver Twist”. Dickens always tries to bring out the other side of the glorious English Society. During the Eighteenth century, the so called Victorian society had a humongous development in science and technology. Railways(steam engines),Postal service, Industries, Radio and other prominent inventions emerged during this time. One could easily evidence the slow transformation of England society from Agrarian society to developed modernized industrialized society, as everything has its own terms and conditions. People started migrating to England, the problem of urbanization also emerged as the industries sought for cheap man power. This strain of exploitation by the capitalist is portrayed in a highly striking manner by Dickens in his novels. Victorian society, also was evidenced one the major issues of prostitution which became vehemently rampant is clearly seen through the character Nancy. She is forced into prostitution by Bill Skies, not only her but also a young girl called Charlotte, who falls in a love trap of Noah Claypole makes her life miserable by pushing into prostitution. The main protagonist of the novel Oliver has to face all the odds at very young age, even after so much of suffering he emerges to be one of the kindest soul at the end of the novel. Oliver works as weaver in the okaum industry, in a very terrible conditions, He works as a chimney sweeper as the tender hands could easily reach the innermost regions of the chimney.

When he encounters the company of Fagin, he is taught to pick pocketing. And in the due course of time, he is trained to be professional thief. Under the guidance of Fagin and Bill Sykes, Oliver learns all the horrendous crimes, but whom is to be blamed for?? is it the poor law system of society???that it could not protect one of orphan child or is it the rapid urban developed society.

**Analysis and Interpretation:** In Oliver Twist, Charles shows a real picture of the horrendous childhood of many poor Victorian orphans. They were less fed, and they were given one scoop of gruel per meal. Oliver, being treated unjustly compared to other children, he is courageous to voice his opinion and always asked for more serving. One day during the supper time, “The evening arrived; the boys took their places. The master, in his cook’s uniform, stationed himself at the copper; his pauper assistants ranged themselves behind him; the gruel was served out; and a long grace was said over the short commons. The gruel disappeared; the boys whispered each other, and winked at Oliver; while his

next neighbors nudged him. Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own imprudent: 'Please, sir, I want some more.' [15] Oliver Twist can also be analyzed as that of a Victorian child reproach a social obsolete dogma pertaining to initial dilapidated neighboring of Victorian era. It is when Oliver goes with Sowerberry to get the remains of a woman, who died of hunger. One can see the clear pictures of the slum life of England. "Some houses which had become insecure from age and decay, were prevented from falling into the street, by huge beams of wood reared against the walls, and firmly planted in the road; but even these crazy dens seemed to have been selected as the nightly haunts of some houseless wretches, for many of the rough boards which supplied the place of door and window, were wrenched from their position, to afford an aperture wide enough for the passage of a human body. The kennel was stagnant and filthy. The very rats, which here and there lay putrefying in its rottenness, were hideous with famine." (Ch. 5, 44) Charles was successful in making the voices of general public being heard. He shows convincingly the inordinate, filthiness, disease, decomposed and the gut wrenching pain of the human society which tends to be modernized society. Oliver Twist is a significant novel which portrays the clear symptoms of Victorian social moral sense of right and wrong.

Dickens was completely vigilant about the plight of the women. Nancy is forcefully pushed into prostitution by poverty, food and life in a depraved state. John Bayley, in his criticism shows "Nancy's living is the living of England, a nightmare society in which drudgery is endless and stupefying, in which the natural affections are warped, and the dignity of man appears only in resolution and violence. It is a more disquieting picture than the carefully and methodically symbolized social panoramas of Bleak House, Little Dorrit, and Our Mutual Friend." [61]

**Conclusion:** From the baby farm to the Fagin's gang, the journey of Oliver tends to be pathetic but in the end he is saved by his aunt Rose Maylie. But Mr. Brownlow finally adopts Oliver and gives him a better life. Hence, to substantiate Oliver now is aware of both the rich and poor form of living, Oliver finishes his journey with the classes. As Oliver's journey is long and difficult. This experience makes him exposed to the high and low ways of living in England. Oliver is aware of his true identity, status, position in society and he is not just a orphan who is poor but once belonged to a respectable family. However, Charles Dickens has successfully managed to show the hypocrisy of the society of England. The striking reality is that Oliver has become auto protected as he becomes immune to all the atrocities, "Although Oliver had been brought up by philosophers, he was not theoretically acquainted with the beautiful axiom that self-preservation is the first law of nature."

#### References:

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3. Covert, Colin (2007-11-20). "Movie review: Romanticism trumps reason in Rush". Star Tribune. Archived from the original on 10 December 2007. Retrieved 2007-12-15. If Charles Dickens were alive today, he might be writing projects like August Rush, the unabashedly sentimental tale of a plucky orphan lad who falls in with streetwise urchins as he seeks the family he ought to have. Come to think of it, Dickens did write that one, and called it Oliver Twist.
4. Souvik Chatterji Master of Law from Warwick University, Coventry, UK, footnote [2] (2007). Influence of Bengali Classic Literature in Bollywood films.
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