

Social purpose in Dickens's novels

:- In the late half of the Eighteenth Century, there started an Industrial Revolution in Europe. But its effect on the social life of England was the emergence of a world in which the evils of social injustice became deeply accentuated. As it was impossible to ignore them, a class of novels arose which frankly had a purpose behind them. Such were Disraeli's 'Sybil', Charlotte Brontë's 'Shirley', Mrs. Gaskell's 'Mary Barton', Charles Beade's 'Hard Cash' and Kingsley's 'Hypatia' etc. Of these, Dickens was the leader, and the pioneer.

Even in the first novel, 'Pickwick Papers', the scenes in the Fleet Street Prison are intended to draw attention to certain evils. In 'Oliver Twist' he shows how the ~~innocent~~ inhuman conditions in the work-house for the poor created a criminal class into which many innocent boys drifted under painful circumstances. The obvious purpose of 'Nicholas Nickleby' is the reform of schools under private management. 'Hard Times' is an attack on orthodox political economy based on laissez-faire.

In other novels, he attacked the procedure in Law Courts, and in Govt. Offices which he called 'circulocation Office' and with vices like the worship of wealth.

Dickens knew from personal experience that children were the most sociable of all creatures; this made him so poignantly the tragedy of little David Copperfield left alone, neglected and uncared for. Similarly, the character of Pip in 'Great Expectations' is a penetrating study. In most of his novels, Dickens plays the role of a crusader for the oppressed sections of English society. His aim, primarily, is to bring the conscience of society by playing upon its feelings and presenting scenes of wretchedness and misery that could be shown as the result of social indifference and callousness.

'Nicholas Nickleby' exposed what was going on behind the doors of private schools. This novel revealed to the public the vulgar and brutal ignorance of a certain class of teachers in private academies. 'Martin Chuzzlewit' records the disillusionment. In 'Hard Times', Dickens attacks the industrial evils of his day. Coketown represents all industrial towns while Gradgrinds and Bounderby

Serve as the inhuman representatives of the system of enlightened self-interest that had only theory to recommend it. The target of 'Little Dorrit' is the unreformed civil service with its nepotism and its injustice.

In an age marked by callousness and complacency, Dickens never lost faith in fundamental human goodness. Although he could see with clear eyes the stronger impersonal evil created by society, he continued to believe in the kindly fatherhood of God and in the triumphant power of love. Organizations whether political or charitable or religious, he rejected. Systems, no matter how efficient can't be the substitute for human relationships. Dickens saw the great solvent of the grief and misery that had poisoned life around him in the Victorian age, a tough age.

The End

Prade