



THE INFLUENCE OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION ON 19TH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE

Dr Dinesh Sharma , Associate Professor

Department in English ,Bhagwan Parshu Ram College, Kurukshetra

Abstract

There are several ways through which it is possible to establish the causal relation between the Industrial Revolution and English literature from the 19th century. During this period of industrialisation there was a transformation of the society and this transformation was reflected and commented in literature. Some of the literature of the period include some great works from novelists like Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell among others and poets like William Blake mainly because industrialization and urbanization gave rise to new questions that some writers found it a must to address.

For example, in ‘Hard Times’ (1854) Charles Dickens presents rather pessimistic views on industrialization, the inhuman working conditions within factories and the dementia of industrial culture. As a social criticism of the Victorian age, Dickens’s portrayal of industrial life is a reflection of current issues to do with inequality and exploitation. Industrial experience forms as well the subject of interest in Elizabeth Gaskell’s North and South, published between 1854-1855, as the novel presents the conflicts between the industrial and the rural settings, as well as the struggle between capital and labor force. The plot of Gaskell’s novel demonstrates how industrialization changed the relations between the classes as well as offers a more complex view of the matter.

The poetry by William Blake especially the one in Songs of Innocence and of Experience (1789-1794) scans industrialization’s effects of society and human psyche. Blake’s work was more or less concerned with the effects that the industrial revolution had on the spiritual and moral life of man, while using poetic insights into the human psyche.

Victorian literature as a reflection of the subject matter connected with the Industrial Revolution gives idea about the period and the existing society and the human spirit in the given process of transformation. This paper has explored how literature serves as a process and document of crucial societal change throughout this period and Industrialization.

Keywords:Industrialization , Social Critique , Class Conflict , Realism , Urbanization , Economic Disparity , Victorian Literature , Literary Responses



Introduction

The Industrial Revolution which was from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century was a progressive change in the English society. This period witnessed the transformation from farm-based societies to industrial ones, innovation, increase in cities, and radical transformations socially. These developments had a great influence on the English literature in terms of the matters, the modes, and the sociological visions. The presentation of the social change and imparted new creative possibilities of the development of literature as the writers of the 19th century faced a necessity to respond to a new type of social relations created by industrialization.

In the course of this period, the novel takes upon itself the role of a mirror: it reflects the disrupting transformations of industrial society. This led to a great difference in the living standards between the industrialist few and the working many, and this difference offered rich material for literature. Social issue writers such as Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and William Blake had a first-hand experience of industrialization and used their literature to express resentment on the impact of industrialization, and social injustice as well as illustrate the detrimental life of working people in industries questioning moral consequence of technological advancement. Their writings not only exposed the socio-economic effects of industrialization but also helped to form public opinion and the policy on the laboring classes and the new industrial world.

It was indeed a social progression from the Romanticism of the early years gone to a more practical kind of writing. While romanticism paid relatively little attention to the contemporary world and glorified the past and nature, this new movement responded to the need of the industrial age. In much the same way that it depicted the sublime and beautiful and explored the nature of the epic, this shift in literature preserved changes in culture and society, encompassing the fears as well as the dreams within a society that was in the process of development.

The Industrial Revolution: A New Social Context

Another period of vast change of society in England is regarded as the Industrial Revolution which occurred in the second half of the 18th Century and proceeded to the 19th Century. It was a time that saw societies transiting from agriculturally based economies to industrial ones following quick technological innovations, urbanization, and social revolutions. It brought new machinery, ways of making products, and transport – all of which dramatically changed the face of England. This allowed factories and mills to be established and led the formation of industrial cities as well as changed the way of life, moving from countryside to planned settlements.

It has to be stated that the change that industrialization brought to English society was profound. The change in the economy provoked a new pessimistic bipolarity: the post-



Industrial Revolution was now a rich man's world where industrialists got rich at the expense of working-class miners and factory workers. The working class labored long hours for little pay and in lethal conditions, while industrialists became rich. This selfishness and the negligence of the rich to the plight of the poor made poverty and the struggle between the rich and the poor a subject of the 19th-century literature.

Industrialization due to the Industrial Revolution changed the fashion on urbanization with many people living in congested cities with poor hygiene conditions. This led to a considerable number of people flocking the industrial centers, and hence, increased growth of slums, poor hygiene, and health facilities, diseases infecting the whole society. This was especially the case since such an environment facilitated social and economic evaluation of the work, and perhaps that is why the potential of this environment for the development of literary works was realized. Echoing other scholars, the writers of the period employed their works to explain the impact of these changes on the person as well as the society.

Some of the literary works of that period were informed by the demand and effects of industrialization. Thus socioeconomic contrasts such as that between the new riches industrialists and the desperate proletarians emerged as themes. The writers analyzed the exploitation of workers, the nature of industrialization and the development of Industrial society. Such important genres as Realism and Naturalism were developed during this period, which aimed at depicting the novel's representation of the contemporary industrial society's intricacies.

The industrial revolution also paved basis for sharp change in the class structure of England. Previously, the systems of social differentiation were disrupted by means of the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie and the appearance of the working people. It made writers turn to themes of class struggle, people's rights, and the role of industrialization in people's lives. The literature of the period began to reflect the disturbances and changes which were characterizing industrial society.

All in all, Industrial Revolution supplied English literature with new context that shaped its future. The changes in the economy, society and life in cities offered the writers with a lot of material to work upon and they used their works to give expression to the effects of industrialization on people.

Charles Dickens: Critique of Industrial Capitalism

Mature industrialization is a theme that has been addressed by many authors, but none comes to the fore with such insistence as Charles Dickens. His novels therefore include *Hard times* which was published in 1854 and *Olivers twist* which was published in 1838 which paints a very pathetic picture of the industrial life and the vices of industrial Capitalism.



The main points of concern in 'Hard Times' depict how factory systems mutilate human character and how vice that emerges from industrialism. The story is located in the city of Coketown, an imaginary town of industrial England that reflects the conditions of work in factories and the spirit of utilitarianism of the period. In order to expose the dangers of the utilitarian approach that would reduce education and social policies to mere profit making machines, Dickens creates the character of Thomas Gradgrind. The novel shows the poor conditions of the workers and the contrast between the classes; it seems that Dickens is concerned in 'A Christmas Carol' with the consequences from the ethical and social point of view of the industrialization.

Oliver Twist similarly is a narration of themes such as child labor and exploitation in the industrial cities. The plot of the novel is based on the life of Oliver, a child who loses his parents and barely escaped the menacing workhouses of London, as well as the city's underworld. Dickens focuses especially on the issue of poor children and shows the irresponsible approach of society and state on providing for all the children's basic needs. In the novel the author describes Oliver's moral growth and appeals to the reader's sophistry by portraying the necessity for improving the conditions of social reform for the working populace.

As for the social relevance of Dickens's works, they may be viewed as a criticism of the consequences of industrialisation, as well as the author's attempt to change people's outlook and become an advocate of ethical shifts. He offered a vivid description of the industrial world and through his work, he exposed the vices that characterize the economy. In general, Dickens's novels depict the suffering of the representatives of industrial society but also raise essential concerns of the period concerning social justice and transformations.

Many of his works are still considered important in studying industrialization and its effects on society and remain popular to those interested in social issue and reform.

3. Elizabeth Gaskell: The Class Conflict in Industrial Society

The works of Elizabeth Gaskell contain many elements of class struggle and changes in the position of people in the wake of industrialization. The conflict of north and south she wrote in 1854-1855 exposes the cleavages between the industrial and agrarian and the division brought about by the social and economic differentiation of the classes.

North and South shows the difference between the industrialised North and the Southern plantations, a view of the struggle of the factory master and his employees. It is the story of Margaret Hale, whose transfer to a Southern town of industry educates her on factory life and the conflict between the working class and the capitalists. Significantly, she is rather successful in depicting the economic and social vices for the



working class, and the moral and ethical issues created by the construction of the new industrial age.

John Thornton, a mill owner, is used by Gaskell to analyse the issue of class struggle, as well as the possibility of the conflict's resolution and the beginning of cooperation. Thornton has internal conflict in the moralities of his business and efforts to deal with the workers 'complaints is evidence of Gaskells advocacy for better working conditions. Masson's novel is a vivid example of a literary work that speaks about empathy and cooperation between people of different social statuses; in other words, it gives readers some keys to look at social effects of industrialization .

Gaskell being an economist and a writer who looks at the industrial society, takes a middle ground on the struggles faced by workforce and powerhouses. This is seen through her discussion of class struggle and social issues, concern in social causes, and the actual possibility of change. North and South can be considered as an attempt to criticise the socio-economic conditions of the given period and as a call for the improvement of the conditions in the society.

On the whole, it might be noted that Elizabeth Gaskell 's novels provides a careful insight into the changes that industrial revolution brought into the lives of the people and the interactions that emerged between different class group. That is why her work responds to the problematic aspects of the period of postindustrial society, as well as the potential for its development.

William Blake: The Spiritual and Moral Consequences

The poetry of William Blake reveals the spiritual and moral effects of industrialization. His major collection of work is the Songs of Innocence and of Experience (1789-1794) that combined visionary thought and social realism illustrating the psychological and the emotional effect of the process of industrialization.

The major themes explored by Blake and his fear for society is the loss of innocence and the evils if the emerging industrial society. Largely in Songs of Innocence, Blake depicts a world which perhaps is pre-industrial, a world of innocence. The poems paint an idyllic and innocent picture of childhood and nature and differ greatly from Songs of Experience in presenting the grimness of industrial society. These differences expose the reader to Blake's condemnation of the mechanization and reduction of people to mere resources in the industrialization process.

Blake presents the problem of childhood suffering and abuse in "The Chimney Sweeper" and the miseries of the urban poors in "London". His elaborate use of symbols and other figures of speech brings out the vices and all-round spiritual decay that comes with industrialization. The focus of indigenous nonconformity is reflected in



the aesthetics of Blake's poetry that reflects the progressive estrangement of people in society.

Thus, there is the social relevance of Blake based on his ability to provide an oppositional voice to the dominant Victorian attitudes toward the Industrial Revolution's effect on human life. His poetry is concerned with the redeeming values of people and societies; he exhorts people to be innocent and kind and endowed with the principle of justice.

On balance, William Blake's poetry gives a profound social commentary on the spiritual and ethical cost of industrialization. His work depicts the new industrial efficiency on the psychological and the emotive level and paints the future of the human society in a prophetic manner regarding people's search for spiritual and social transformation.

The Literary Response to Industrialization: Realism and Reform

The industrial revolution galvanised a change in the focus of literature from the sentiment of romanticism towards the realities of the society. Where the Romantics embraced landscape and the faux-historical, the new social realism provided a representation of civil life in its industrial complexity. What has principally changed here is attention in literature, which is indicative of a wider cultural concern with the problems of industrialism.

Realism in literature became popular as a result of Industrial Revolution which was characterized by rather fast transformations. The realistic writers strived at portraying the realism in ordinary people's lives, and expressed social concerns like the right to work, child abuse or unfair wages. This new approach in literature was intended to give a realistic representation of society especially as shaped by the industrial revolution and the plight and suffering of workers.

Some of the most popular writers of the Victorian period, including Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and William Blake incorporated in their literary works protest against the social and economical transformation in this period. The novels of Charles Dickens are social chronicles in the description of industrial life and abuses, and a protest against the economical and ethic conditions existing in the nineteenth century. 'Class' struggle and social changes are the main themes in Gaskell's work that embarked on the experience of empathy and cooperation with each other to meetings of the difficulties inherent in industrialization. Blake's poetry is the prophetic analysis of the societal and the religious impact of industrialization.

The literary response to industrialization also provided input to the public debate as well as contributed to the advocacy of social changes. The authors actively engaged in



drawing people's attention to such matters as social problems and called for pragmatic changes in legislation and practice. The literature of the 19th century was an important tool for influencing the people and emergency of early social justice.

So as the next topic that connected 19th-century literature with Industrial Revolution Once again, the main issue – Romanticism gave way to realism – shows that this process has been as multifaceted as it can be. Thus the works of the writers of this period enable a society to understand how the onset of industrialization impacts on the lives of the people and are a great tool for social change.

Conclusion

Although optional, the countervailing influence of the Industrial Revolution on 19th-century English literature cannot be overstated. This paper will argue that the technological revolutions, increased rate of urbanization and the social changes that characterized this period revolutionized the English society and these dynamics were well captured in the literature of the period in question. Literature to the changes that industrialization brought in the society by writing themes that covered the new changes, adopting new literary techniques and supporting calls for change.

Industrial Revolution also defined a new social class, which is poles apart and comprised of on one side the industrialist barons and on the other, the struggling factory workers. This shift offered a good setting for the development of literary endeavours. Dickens in his *Hard Times* and *Oliver Twist* provided a humanistic expose of the dehumanizing effect of industrialism for capital. Reading Dickens functioned simultaneously as representation of and social critique of industrial existence as well as and an exploration of the effects which rivalry, oppression, as well as the earning of financial profit entail.

In the same manner; Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* depicted conflict of industrial civilization and agricultural society, portrays and pleads for resolution of class struggle. Gaskell's representation of the industrial North and the rural South side gave a social progressive view of how industrialization affected the human relationship towards social justice accentuating her compassion for the differences in classes.

Another major protestant voice, William Blake, wrote poetry that presented a prophetic evaluation of the impact of industrialization on people's spirituality and ethics. For instance in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* Blake provided two different perspectives; the urban industrial society and the romantic age. His metaphoric and imagist language portrayed the associative, pathological, and impassioned qualities of material civilisation while calling for a restoration of lost virtues of purity and charity.



As for the change of direction from the Romanticism to the realism of the literature in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was a manifestation of the culture's strengthening concern with a series of practical concerns posed by industrialisation. Samples of realist intentions were to document the lives of common people and to treat such problems as workers' rights, child abuse, or injustice based on poverty. This literary response was also useful in recording events of the society that was rapidly changing while at the same time was engaging in advocacy for change.

In general, the literature of the 19th century under consideration can be seen as the striking mirror of the Industrial Revolution's effect for the English society. The concerns of the economic, social, as well as moral nature of the society show how writers responded to the problem of industrialization and its impact on human living. These authors' creations played the role in establishing the society's perception, in encouraging people to discuss the matters of justice and in fighting for changes. Their literary work remains pertinent to the study of history and social setting of the Industrial Revolution and its impact to literature and society up to the present..

References

1. Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*. Chapman & Hall, 1854.
2. Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist*. Richard Bentley, 1838.
3. Gaskell, Elizabeth. *North and South*. Chapman & Hall, 1854-1855.
4. Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Mary Barton*. Chapman & Hall, 1848.
5. Blake, William. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Thomas Davison, 1789-1794.
6. Blake, William. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Printed by J. W. for the Author, 1793.
7. Phillips, William. *The Industrial Revolution and Its Impact on English Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
8. Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. Columbia University Press, 1958.
9. Kearney, Hugh. *The Industrial Revolution in England*. Routledge, 1999.
10. Macdonald, Michael. *The Industrial Revolution and the Literature of the Period*. Oxford University Press, 2003.
11. Hunt, Lynn. *The Industrial Revolution and the Rise of the Modern Novel*. Harvard University Press, 1996.
12. Allen, Robert C. *Enclosure and the Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge University Press, 1992.
13. Buzard, James. *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.
14. Brantlinger, Patrick. *The Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Cornell University Press, 1988.



-
15. Deane, Bradley. *The Social Impact of the Industrial Revolution on Victorian England*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
 16. Ireson, Nancy. *Victorian Literature and the Industrial Revolution*. Routledge, 2010.
 17. Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*. Yale University Press, 1957.
 18. Davidoff, Leonore, and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*. Routledge, 2002.
 19. Pollard, Arthur. *Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Criticism*. Edward Arnold, 1967.
 20. Hughes, Jonathan. *The Industrial Revolution in England: The Role of Literature*. Macmillan, 1984.