

**POVERTY AND SUFFERING OF THE CHILDREN IN SELECT ENGLISH NOVEL***Dr. A. Gowri, Karaikudi, TN*

Poverty is a multifaceted concept that includes social, economic and political elements which deprives of basic necessities of life. There are indeed many reasons for which the children are inclined to drop out of school. In world's population half of the children live in poverty. Poor children cannot get anything easily including their education. They struggle even for their food. They can be easily provoked by anything like fatigue and frustration.

According to Peter Townsend, "Humans are social animals entangled in a web of relationships, which exert complex and changing pressures as much in their consumption of goods and services as in any other aspect of their behaviour".

Women also suffer a lot due to poverty after children. They are ready to send their children to do any work for low wages. Child labour refers to the employment of children in any work which interferes their basic rights including their education. Every child has his basic right to have a good education and the right to play during his childhood. But poor children are employed easily by the selfish people because they do not demand their wages and they are not aware of getting education which is one of their fundamental rights.

Charles Dickens was a novelist, journalist and social analyst. He is one of the most influential writers of the nineteenth century.

*Oliver Twist* is Dickens' first novel. The main theme of this novel is poverty and child labour. Charles Dickens wrote "*Oliver Twist*" during the time of Industrial Revolution in Britain. He was only Twenty five years old when he started writing this novel. Here Charles Dickens reveals the problem of the poor children and how they were abused in the society by the selfish people. This novel depicts his own life experiences. The children were sent to some dangerous jobs then due to their poverty. He strongly believes that the state of poverty leads a person into the world of cruelty and crime.

In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens deals with the problems of Oliver and how he experiences physical and emotional suffering throughout his life. Oliver is very poor and has little food to eat which makes him always hungry. He cannot lead a comfortable life. He spends his babyhood in a baby farm till the age of nine. Mrs Mann takes care of him. When he was nine years old Mr. Bumble puts him to work at the main work house. There he suffers a lot for a little food. Mr. Gamfield, an unkind person, takes Oliver as an apprentice. Later Mr. Sowerberry takes Oliver with him. Mrs. Sowerberry is a brutal woman who ill-treats Oliver. Oliver also suffers a lot because of Noah Claypole who is a very rude fellow apprentice. His self-introduction itself is awful:

"I'm Mister Noah Claypole", said the charity boy "and you're under me. Take down the shutters, yer idle young ruffian".

He always scolds Oliver by using harsh words. Charlotte the Sowerberry's maid servant is in love with Noah. Noah always insults Oliver by scolding Oliver's mother very badly. Oliver gets angry with Noah. But Mrs. Sowerberry supports Noah and beats Oliver. She also complains about Oliver to her husband and beats once again. Oliver is completely upset and weeps. Then he decides to run away to London for a better life.

In London, Jack Dawkins a criminal, who is known by the nickname as the "Artful Dodger" provides Oliver a free meal and accommodation. Oliver is very grateful to dodger and follows him and starts his life unwittingly as a criminal. Oliver is unaware of criminal occupations and he believes that they

make handkerchiefs and wallets. Charley and Dodger steal the handkerchief of an old man named Mr. Brownlow. Mr. Brownlow suspects that Oliver, who runs away in fright, is the thief. He catches Oliver with the help of other people. But he believes that Oliver looks very innocent. So he takes Oliver with him and treats him very kindly. When Mr. Brownlow sends Oliver out for the payment of some books, one of the persons in the gang, a young girl named Nancy sees him and informs Artful Dodger. Oliver is caught by the criminal gang again.

Oliver is compelled by Fagin to participate in burglary. Seeing this Nancy sympathizes with Oliver and decides to help him. Meantime, during a robbery Oliver is shot by the people and wounded in his left arm. Nancy is ashamed of her role in Oliver's miserable condition and thinks of his safety. Fagin thinks that she has a new boyfriend and tries to find the truth. In the meantime, Noah steals money from Mr. Sowerberry and flies to London with Charlotte.

Oliver is starved, kicked, beaten and forced to work in his childhood. Really Charles Dickens reveals the life of the poor children in day-to-day life.

“*David Copperfield*” is another example of a child's struggles and sufferings for his self-fulfilment.

“*David Copperfield*” is an autobiography of Charles Dickens. David was born in Blunderstone, Suffolk, England, six months after the death of his father. He was happy with his childish mother and his nurse Peggotty, very kind to both of them. When David was seven years old, his mother married a rude man, Edward Murdstone. Mr. Murdstone whipped David and sent him with Peggotty's family which was in Yarmouth. Peggotty was living with his adopted relatives Emily and Ham, and Mrs. Gummidge. Meanwhile David fell in love with Emily. David went to school at Salem House, which was run by Mr. Creakle. David found new friends named James Steerforth and Tommy Traddles.

One day David heard sad demise of his lovable mother and his baby brother. David was completely upset and shocked. When he returned home his step father Mr. Murdstone neglected him and sent him to London to work in his wine-bottling factory. He was only ten years old at that time. There was nobody to protect and support David.

In London, David met Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. He liked them very much and led his life peacefully with them. The Micawbers had many money problems and finally they were arrested and sent to prison. When David came to know this news he was really upset. He lost the most lovable persons who took care of him. So there was nobody for David in London too. So he moved from London to Dover to meet his aunt Betsey. When he met his aunt she treated him well and sent him to a good school. After completing his graduation, David worked in the law office and fell in love with Mr. Spenlow's daughter Dora. He married Dora, an irresponsible girl who knew nothing about housekeeping. She was completely impractical. David often called Dora as a “Child-Wife”. One day she fell ill and passed away. So David decided to go abroad after his wife's death. He stayed abroad for three years.

When he returned, he realized that Agnes Wickfield had been his true love all along and he married her finally.

To sum up, we can realize that David is the most realistic and touching young man. David had suffered a lot throughout his life. This novel revealed the fact that how other forces could interfere and overcome one's fate. Charles Dickens told a story that seemed very reliable and painful through the character of David.

In the article entitled '*David Copperfield and The Bildungsroman: Their contribution to Charles Dickens' reputation*', Sakchai Lunlaporn assents the point that the novel depicts the miserable life of the young boy that evoked sympathy. Moreover he compares the two characters David and Oliver aptly:

Indeed, *David Copperfield* established Dickens' reputation through the story of the young David which is similar to that of young Oliver in that they are both young boy protagonists whose lives have been deprived of boyhood happiness by fate. However, David is hugely different because he is particularly in search of his true identity to become a grown man,

whereas Oliver is simply struggling to survive in circumstances beyond his control in a cruel society.

*Untouchable* is a novel by an Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand. According to Shashi Yadhav, problem of untouchability is still prevalent in the society and Anand brings to light the sorrows and sufferings that high caste Hindus inflicted on the untouchables. The novel was published in 1935. This novel shows the realistic picture of the society. It depicts the life of an untouchable boy Bakha, a young sweeper. The low caste people are suffering a lot in their life due to their caste. Bakha symbolizes the hypocrisy of the upper caste people and how they do injustice to the people like Bakha.

Bakha's family lives in Bulashah. Their house is located near the latrines of the town. Bakha is not interested in his occupation, cleaning the latrines and his father abuses him for not doing his work. Bakha always thinks of his friends and ignores his father's words. He dreams the way of living like an "Englishman".

Bakha's family is restricted to take water directly from the well. Sohini, Bakha's sister goes to bring water and she waits for a sympathetic person, one who belongs to a higher caste. Some women are waiting there like Sohini to get water from the higher caste person. One of the women in that group is Gulabo. She is very jealous of Sohini. She scolds her by using scornful words. But Sohini bears everything for Bakha who is waiting for water. Most of the low caste people are not educated. In this novel Mulk Raj Anand brings out this problem through Bakha and his friends. Though Bakha is interested to go to school, his caste is an obstacle to get his education.

He is not bold enough to protest against the higher caste person who cheats him. Once he goes to the shop and asks the shopkeeper to give candy. But the shopkeeper cheats him by not weighing the scale correctly. When Bakha comes to know this, he does not find fault with the shopkeeper for cheating him. Instead of that he feels very happy to have some candies in his hand. One day while Bakha is waiting on the road, he does not notice a high caste man walking nearby and he dashes him mistakenly. That person abuses Bakha in front of others by using undignified words. Bakha begs him and pleads his apology, but he is not ready to forgive him. All the other people too start to insult Bakha for his mistake. Bakha starts to think of himself and his caste. He is filled with frustration, anger and revenge. Mulk Raj Anand focuses attention towards the customs and social evils of our society during 1930's.

Thus the novelists bring the reality of the society and the real condition of the poor people and their suffering to survive in the midst of the arrogant human beings.

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