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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGY TRAUMA AND HYPOCRISY OF CHARITY IN CHARLES DICKENS'S OLIVER TWIST

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Abstract

The English writer Charles Dickens was known for his work as a novelist, journalist, short story writer, and social critic. He was the creator of some of literature's most well-known fictional characters, and many consider him to be the greatest novelist of the Victorian era. Charles Dickens's era witnessed significant changes in children and social reality due to the Industrial Revolution and the prevalent socio-economic conditions. Due to widespread poverty, a significant number of children were required to work in factories, mines, and as chimney sweeps. The increase in orphans and homeless children was due to diseases, poor living conditions, and high mortality rates among adults. The harsh conditions of many children living on the street or in workhouses caused high child mortality rates, as well as inadequate medical care, poor nutrition, and unsanitary living conditions. Overcrowded urban areas experienced a spike in diseases such as cholera, typhus, and tuberculosis. "Oliver Twist" is notable for its unflinching depiction of the underbelly of Victorian society and its criticism of social institutions that fail to protect the vulnerable. Dickens's vivid characterizations and dramatic storytelling make the novel both a compelling narrative and a powerful social commentary. So the Aim of this research paper is focussing on Hypocrisy of charity, Psychological Trauma, Social Reform. Dickens criticises the institutions meant to aid the poor, like the workhouse system, which often caused more harm than good. The psychological impact of poverty, abuse, and neglect on individuals, especially children. Highlighting the need for societal change and the impact of social reform movements on improving conditions for the poor.

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Introduction:-

Psychology Trauma in the novel Oliver Twist

Charles Dickens' novel "Oliver Twist" is a rich tapestry of social commentary, focusing on the dire conditions of the poor in 19th-century London. Among its many themes, the psychological trauma experienced by the protagonist, Oliver Twist, stands out as a critical aspect of the narrative. Dickens uses Oliver's journey to illustrate the profound and lasting impact of trauma on an individual's psyche and development.

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From the very beginning, Oliver's life is marked by abandonment and neglect. Born in a workhouse, he is immediately thrust into a hostile environment where he is viewed as a burden rather than a human being. The lack of maternal care and the brutal treatment by the workhouse officials set the stage for Oliver's early experiences of trauma. The workhouse, depicted as a place of cruelty and dehumanisation, instils in Oliver a deep sense of insecurity and fear. This environment not only deprives him of basic physical needs but also of emotional warmth and stability, crucial for healthy psychological development.

As Oliver grows, he is subjected to further psychological trauma through the harsh realities of child labour. Sent to work for undertaker Mr. Sowerberry, Oliver endures physical abuse and emotional torment, particularly from Noah Claypole and Mrs. Sowerberry. This relentless mistreatment exacerbates Oliver's feelings of worthlessness and helplessness, common reactions in traumatised children. Dickens vividly portrays how constant exposure to violence and ridicule can erode a child's self-esteem and sense of identity.

Oliver's eventual escape to London marks a pivotal moment in his life, yet it also introduces him to a new form of psychological trauma: the criminal underworld. Fagin, a manipulative and unscrupulous figure, represents the exploitation of vulnerable children. Fagin's gang, consisting of young boys trained to pickpocket, is a microcosm of a society that preys on the weak. Oliver's brief involvement with the gang exposes him to moral corruption and danger, further compounding his trauma. The constant fear of being caught and punished, combined with the moral confusion instilled by Fagin, leaves lasting scars on Oliver's psyche.

Despite the relentless adversities, Oliver's innate goodness and resilience shine through. This resilience is a testament to Dickens' belief in the inherent goodness of individuals, regardless of their circumstances. Oliver's encounters with kind-hearted characters like Mr. Brownlow and Rose Maylie provide him with glimpses of compassion and love, crucial for his healing process. These interactions are vital in counteracting the effects of his earlier trauma, illustrating the importance of a supportive and nurturing environment for recovery.

Dickens also uses Oliver's story to critique the systemic failures of society. The novel highlights how institutions like the workhouse and the legal system, meant to protect and support the vulnerable, often contribute to their suffering. By exposing these flaws, Dickens advocates for social reform and a more humane approach to dealing with poverty and child welfare.

"*Oliver Twist*" is not merely a tale of adventure and hardship but a profound exploration of psychological trauma. Through Oliver's experiences, Dickens sheds light on the devastating impact of neglect, abuse, and exploitation on a child's mind. Yet, he also offers a message of hope, emphasising the potential for resilience and recovery with the right support and care. Oliver's journey from a neglected orphan to a cherished member of a loving family underscores the enduring human spirit's capacity to overcome even the darkest of circumstances.

Social Reform in the novel *Oliver Twist*

Charles Dickens' "*Oliver Twist*" is a landmark novel not only for its vivid storytelling and memorable characters but also for its potent social commentary. At the heart of the narrative lies a searing critique of the social injustices of Dickens' time, particularly the treatment of the poor and vulnerable. Through the journey of the orphaned Oliver Twist, Dickens exposes the systemic failures of institutions meant to aid the needy and advocates for social reform. This exploration delves into the various aspects of social reform depicted in the novel, examining how Dickens uses his characters and settings to highlight the need for change.

Critique of the Poor Laws and Workhouses

One of the central themes of "*Oliver Twist*" is the harsh reality of the Poor Laws and the workhouse system. Introduced in 1834, the New Poor Law aimed to reduce the cost of supporting the poor by discouraging reliance on public assistance. It did so by making conditions in workhouses deliberately harsh and degrading. Dickens opens the novel with a scathing portrayal of the workhouse where Oliver is born, a place characterised by neglect, starvation, and cruelty. The infamous scene where Oliver asks for more gruel epitomises the dehumanising treatment of the poor. The workhouse officials, such as Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Mann, are depicted as callous and self-serving, caring more about maintaining their power and comfort than the welfare of the orphans.

Through Oliver's experiences, Dickens exposes the workhouses as institutions that fail to provide genuine help to those in need. Instead of offering support and rehabilitation, they perpetuate suffering and reinforce social

inequalities. By highlighting the absurdity and brutality of the workhouse system, Dickens calls for a more humane approach to poverty alleviation, one that respects the dignity and humanity of the poor.

Child Labour and Exploitation

Another major issue addressed in "Oliver Twist" is child labour and exploitation. Oliver's brief stint with the undertaker Mr. Sowerberry reveals the grim reality faced by many children who were forced into labour at a young age. The physical and emotional abuse Oliver endures underscores the vulnerability of child labourers, who were often treated as mere commodities. Dickens vividly portrays the detrimental effects of such exploitation on a child's development and well-being.

Furthermore, the novel delves into the criminal exploitation of children through characters like Fagin, who trains orphaned and abandoned boys to become pickpockets. Fagin represents the worst of society's predators, those who prey on the innocence and desperation of children for their gain. Through these depictions, Dickens not only criticises the societal conditions that allow such exploitation to flourish but also advocates for the protection and proper care of children. His portrayal of the harsh realities of child labour and criminal exploitation serves as a powerful call to reform labour laws and ensure that children are safeguarded from such abuses.

The Justice System

Dickens also takes aim at the justice system, highlighting its flaws and biases against the poor. The character of Mr. Fang, the magistrate who initially judges Oliver, embodies the arbitrary and prejudiced nature of the legal system. Mr. Fang is quick to convict Oliver without proper evidence, driven by his own biases against the poor. This portrayal reflects Dickens' critique of a justice system that often fails to deliver true justice, especially for those without means or social standing.

By contrasting Mr. Fang with more compassionate characters like Mr. Brownlow, Dickens advocates for a justice system based on fairness and empathy rather than prejudice and corruption. The novel suggests that true justice should seek to understand and address the root causes of crime, such as poverty and lack of opportunity, rather than merely punishing the symptoms.

The Role of Charity and Compassion

Throughout "Oliver Twist," Dickens underscores the importance of charity and compassion in addressing social issues. Characters like Mr. Brownlow and Rose Maylie represent the positive impact of genuine kindness and philanthropy. Their willingness to help Oliver, despite his uncertain background, highlights the transformative power of compassion. Mr. Brownlow's efforts to understand and support Oliver contrast sharply with the institutional neglect he previously endured.

Dickens uses these characters to demonstrate that true social reform requires a shift in societal attitudes towards the poor. Instead of viewing them as burdens or criminals, society must recognize their humanity and potential. The novel advocates for personal responsibility in social reform, suggesting that individuals have a role to play in creating a more just and compassionate society.

The Call for Systemic Change

While individual acts of kindness are important, Dickens also emphasises the need for systemic change. The novel's detailed depictions of institutional failures—be it the workhouse, the justice system, or child labour—underscore the necessity of reforming these systems to create lasting change. Dickens suggests that true social reform must go beyond addressing individual cases and tackle the underlying structures that perpetuate inequality and suffering.

Through the character of Mr. Brownlow, Dickens hints at the potential for systemic change driven by individuals in positions of power and influence. Mr. Brownlow's investigation into Oliver's background and his efforts to clear his name represent a model for how those with means can advocate for and effect change within the system. This approach highlights Dickens' belief in the possibility of reform through concerted efforts by both individuals and society at large.

"Oliver Twist" is more than just a novel about an orphan's struggles; it is a powerful critique of the social injustices of Dickens' time and a call to action for reform. By exposing the failures of the Poor Laws, the exploitation of child labour, the biases of the justice system, and the need for compassion and systemic change, Dickens paints a

comprehensive picture of the societal ills that need addressing. His portrayal of Oliver's resilience and the kindness of characters like Mr. Brownlow and Rose Maylie offers a vision of hope and the possibility of a more just and humane society. Through "Oliver Twist," Dickens not only entertains but also educates and inspires his readers to advocate for social reform and to work towards a world where the vulnerable are protected and supported.

Hypocrisy of charity in the novel Oliver Twist

"Oliver Twist," Charles Dickens meticulously explores the theme of hypocrisy in charity, criticising the superficial and self-serving nature of charitable institutions and individuals of his time. Through vivid characterization and narrative detail, Dickens reveals how charity, when driven by hypocrisy, often exacerbates the suffering of those it claims to help.

The Workhouse System

The workhouse is the novel's primary setting for Dickens' critique of hypocritical charity. The administrators of the workhouse, like Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Mann, are ostensibly dedicated to the welfare of the poor. However, their actions reveal a starkly different reality. The workhouse is depicted as a place of cruelty and neglect, where the needs of the poor are consistently ignored or inadequately met. Oliver's famous request for more gruel symbolises the harsh conditions and the indifference of those in charge. These administrators prioritise their comfort and status over the well-being of the inmates, exposing the discrepancy between the supposed mission of the workhouse and its actual operation.

Mrs. Corney and Mr. Bumble

Dickens uses characters like Mrs. Corney (later Mrs. Bumble) to further illustrate the hypocrisy of charitable figures. Mrs. Corney, the matron of the workhouse, presents herself as a compassionate and caring individual. Yet, her true nature is revealed in her callous treatment of the poor and her eagerness to marry Mr. Bumble for personal gain. Her superficial kindness is a facade that hides her self-interest and cruelty. Through Mrs. Corney, Dickens demonstrates how individuals in positions of power within charitable institutions often exploit their roles for personal benefit rather than genuine altruism.

The Board of Governors

The Board of Governors overseeing the workhouse is another embodiment of hypocritical charity. These wealthy individuals are responsible for setting policies that affect the lives of the poor. However, their decisions are guided by a desire to maintain social control and reduce costs rather than to provide genuine aid. The governors' insistence on keeping workhouse conditions harsh and unwelcoming is justified as a means to discourage dependency on public assistance. This attitude reflects a broader societal hypocrisy where charity is extended only to maintain social order and ease the conscience of the wealthy, rather than to alleviate suffering.

Mr. Brownlow and True Compassion

Contrasted with these hypocritical figures is Mr. Brownlow, who represents genuine charity and compassion. Unlike the workhouse officials and the Board of Governors, Mr. Brownlow's aid to Oliver is motivated by true kindness and a desire to help without expectation of personal gain. His efforts to understand Oliver's background and his unwavering support highlight what true charity should look like. Through Mr. Brownlow, Dickens shows that real charity requires empathy, respect, and a commitment to justice, standing in stark contrast to the self-serving actions of the workhouse authorities.

Conclusion:-

In "Oliver Twist," Dickens effectively exposes the hypocrisy of charitable institutions and individuals who prioritise their interests over the needs of those they are supposed to help. By depicting the workhouse system and its administrators as embodiments of this hypocrisy, Dickens criticises the superficiality and self-interest that often underpin charitable efforts. His portrayal of characters like Mr. Brownlow offers a vision of genuine compassion and charity, urging a shift from hypocritical to authentic aid. Through this critique, Dickens advocates for a more sincere and effective approach to charity, one that truly addresses the needs and dignity of the poor. And also exposes the concepts of Psychology trauma and social reform.

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