

Heart versus Head: *Hard Times* as a radical critique of Industrial Capitalism

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Hard Times, published in 1854, at the time of the initial 'textile phase' of the England's Industrial revolution, is a powerful indictment of the inherent exploitative and repressive character of the emerging industrial system that based itself on the reduction and dehumanization of the factory workers as mere mechanical units of manufacture and production, devoid of any human sentiments and emotions. Rightly described as 'the socially conscious novel', or 'the condition of England' novel', *Hard Times*, offers to present, through its structural principle of 'the conflict of opposites', an extremely authentic and radical critique of the class exploitation in a newly industrializing England economy that in its overenthusiastic adoption of industrial capitalist ethos tended to threaten the very existence of human individual into a machine and that of the industrial worker into a mere unit of 'labor power.' This was sought to be done at various levels ranging from public life in a factory to private existence in a family affecting crucial decisions of love and marriage and through the role of power in education system affecting the growth and development of children as thinking and imaginative individuals. The novel, through its two chief advocates of industrial capitalism- Gradgrind and Bounderby- provides a socio-economic critique of the times of early phase of capitalism when the processes of production were ideologically privileged over the inhuman existence of the workers and when a uniform monotonous life of facts found supremacy in private as well as public life, institutional structures and value system that guided the middle nineteenth century England. The resultant crisis referring to working class reactions in the form of various militant actions has aptly been described by one of the eminent historians of the Industrial Revolution:

The most obvious evidence of this crisis is the high wind of social discontent which blew across Britain in successive gusts between the last years of the wars and the middle of the 1840's...Luddite and Radical, trade unionist and utopian socialist, Democratic and Chartist. At no other time in modern British history have the common people been so persistently, profoundly and, often, desperately dissatisfied. At no other period since the seventeenth century can we speak of large masses of them as revolutionary, or discern at least one moment of political crisis...when something like a revolution might actually have developed. (E.J.Hobsbawm, 1969)

Under the impact of this paradigm which suited growing industrialization, notion of an organic and spiritual universe was replaced by that of the world as a machine. The world machine became the dominant metaphor of the modern scientific age. In this world view the basic building blocks of the universe were passive and dead matters which were thought to be movable by external forces. This gave rise to the dualism between matter and spirit, body and mind formulated by the famous Cartesian division. (Capra, 1983) The implication of this is that the material world was devoid of any moral significance or purpose. The idea of natural selection, of evolution by purposive adaptation was applied, by extension, to the analysis and development of society and culture and institutions. It became a bridge between natural and social sciences and humanities. Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism unified inorganic, organic and supra organic evolution and tried to apply the same 'laws' to society and its progress as were applied to the natural order. The first of these notions was that societies, like organisms, were composite wholes made up of functionally integrated parts, and underwent growth, decline, differentiation and integration. The second basic premise was rooted in Victorian laissez-faire which consisted in application of the principle of 'survival of the fittest'. Holbrook(1987: 17-26) relates the ascendancy of Darwinism and its social variant to a historical period of middle class or bourgeois attitudes in a country ridden with deep class-cleavages, in a world in which Britain was engaged in building an Empire, in which industrial revolution was in full swing, with all its social and ideological consequences. Moreover, Darwinism emerged in an intellectual tradition in which Utilitarianism was strong and in which Adam Smith, Herbert Spencer and Thomas Malthus were significant figures. Therefore, there is in these theories a kind of 'detached' impulse to look at human life and society in quantitative, mathematical terms. The onward march of industrialism seemed to demand such impersonality with its assumption that it was natural and proper for the weaker or technically inferior to remain subjugated and oppressed.

The present paper would focus upon the exploitations of the industrial system at three various levels- one, at the level of system of education based on the only thing considered 'needful'- that is- the overfeeding of 'Facts' in the 'monotonous vault of a schoolroom', secondly, at the personal level of human relationships where even something as significant as love and marriage is seen 'simply as one of tangible Fact', and finally, and most importantly, at the level of industrial workers faced with an eighteen hour working day in the most hazardous conditions:

'Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. *Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else.* You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children,

and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!
(emphasis added) (*Hard Times*, Macmillan, 2001: 7)

These famous opening lines of *Hard Times* depicting the whole philosophy of what is considered to be the 'harshest phase' of the industrial revolution in England, seem to be directed specifically against the broad idea of utilitarianism which attempted to thrive upon the basic framework of 'useful knowledge' and rejection of everything associated with imagination or entertainment. The mode of utilitarianism was quintessentially a quantitative mode of thinking which considered even happiness, pleasure and pain as a matter of simple calculations that ought to be expressed in the form of quantity and not quality, for it believed that " what is called Taste, is only another name for Fact." (11)

Thomas Gradgrind and Josiah Bounderby, the two advocates of utilitarian values are 'perfectly devoid of sentiments' and believed that people are to be 'regulated and governed' in all things of life by nothing else but 'by fact.' What more, they even hope to establish a "board of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact."(11) The use of the word 'Fancy', according to them, needed to be discarded altogether for ever because anything that threatened to be contrary to the facts did not have any use value for them. Their belief in the theory of rationalism, a theory that held that reason alone, unaided by experience, could arrive at basic truth regarding the world was so strong that it defied all matters and beliefs of heart and imagination. Associated with rationalism was the doctrine of innate ideas and the method of logically deducing truths about the world from "self-evident" premises as Bounderby did about the working class people.

The mechanizing impacts of industrialization on the juvenile minds are powerfully depicted through the philosophy of the school run by Thomas Gradgrind- 'a man of fact and calculations' who could quantify and measure in an exact manner 'any parcel of human nature' with a rule and a pair of scales and the multiplication table that he always carried in his pocket. It believed that the education should be addressed to the sole faculty of reason and anything that encourages imagination and wonder in the innocent minds, be it poetry or story books or fairy tales, should be totally done away with from the 'cradle upwards.' Gradgrind is shocked at the beginning of the novel to find his two children- 'metallurgical' Louisa and 'mathematical' Thomas, peeping at the circus and tries to probe into the origins of this 'vulgar curiosity.' Little does he realize initially that it is precisely the lack of this curiosity and compassion that would ultimately lead to both his elder children ending up with serious social and personal deficiencies. The same system addressed individual students like Sissy as 'girl number twenty' and eulogizes students like Bitzer for defining a horse in a most factual manner, for this is how the many school teachers like Mr M'Choakumchild had been trained: "He and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs." (12). The

hardening impact of this kind of education could well be surmised through its key belief that lay in never wondering and never stooping to the cultivation of the sentiments and affections: "Never wonder. By means of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, settle everything somehow, and never wonder." (45) But such calculations and bargains do not come to one's rescue when it comes to facing the realities of life and relationships and something else is required to lead a meaningful life, as demonstrated by Gradgrind's own children and by the old pupil Bitzer, who makes it clear at the end that in a kind of schooling where everything was based on cold calculations, the question of self-interest is bound to dominate over everything else. When Gradgrind entreats Bitzer to release his son Tom in lieu of the remembrance of his many years at the former's school, Bitzer reminds his teacher Gradgrind of the fundamental principle of his philosophy where everything including love and respect was to be paid for. Bitzer so proudly declares that: "My schooling was paid for; it was a bargain; and when I came away, the bargain ended."(244) The utilitarian form of education which uses Arithmetic as its fundamental tool, demanded that "nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase...Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter."(244). The world of education was like all other worlds of business where human interactions and relationships have to have their own 'debit and credit balances.' Gratitude and all other virtues springing from it did not have any place in the world of calculations and market.

The kind of corruption and callousness that the fact oriented education brings is most prominently reflected in Gradgrind's own son who not only believes in manipulating his family relations to his own advantage but turns out to be a self-centered crook who can stoop to any level to fulfil his monetary needs. Louisa too finds herself incapable of handling her life and emotions till Sissy, a circus girl, a failure in the above mentioned education system but full of human values of love and compassion, comes to her rescue and helps her to regain her faith and poise.

Dickens simultaneously presents Grandgrind's 'bosom friend'- Bounderby's character to highlight the 'blind aggressiveness' with which early industrial capitalism justified its inhuman growth and development as a system of self-improvement and prosperity:

"He was a rich man: banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not. A big, loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh. A man made out of a coarse material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much of him...A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start. A man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man...A man who was the Bully of humility."(17)

Based on the quintessentially nineteenth century idea of self-improvement, especially in relation to the first generation of industrial capitalists, Bounderby's self assertion and boastfulness is inflated to a point where it is liable to burst and get exposed, which it finally does by none other than his own mother who appears unexpectedly and reveals the truth about his rich and prosperous past. The character of Bounderby is central to Dicken's critique of the industrial system because he had always boasted of never suppressing the 'facts of his life' related to the nuisance of his childhood and young age, when he was 'one of the most miserable little wretches ever seen', 'born in a ditch' and always 'moaning and groaning', being 'so ragged and dirty.' The revelation of truth at the end not only deflates his ego as an individual but also the 'ego' and 'myth' of the whole system of industrialization that similarly swells itself on lies and exaggerations of various kinds.

The devastating effects of the industrial mechanization are too sharp to be ignored at the personal and family level of human relationships, be it Gradgrind or Bounderby. Gradgrind's house has rightly been called a 'Stone Lodge' in the sense that it was as hard, factual and devoid of all sentiments as stone itself. His two elder children Thomas and Louisa, who were grinded to 'mathematical exactness' and were trained to be 'replete with facts' were 'so tired' of everything right from their early age and wanted something as refreshing and entertaining as stealing into the world of Sleary's circus. Despite the strictest kind of regimentation of thoughts by her father, it is difficult for Louisa to reconcile herself to the world totally devoid of excitement, wonder and curiosity. She laments to her brother Tom:

... as I get older, and nearer growing up, I often sit wondering here, and think how unfortunate it is for me that I can't reconcile you to home better than I am able to do. I don't know what other girls know. I can't play to you, or sing to you. I can't talk to you so as to lighten your mind, for I never see any amusing sights or read any amusing books that it would be a pleasure or a relief to you to talk about, when you are tired. (47)

Devoid of any kind of amusement or growth of imaginative faculty, the relation between brother and sister was bound to deteriorate into the kind of corrupt manipulations into which it later found itself after Louisa's marriage with Bounderby and Tom utilizing the connections to his utmost advantage. Louisa's loveless marriage to Bounderby, a person more than double her age, is a classic example of industrial bourgeoisie rationalism that reduces even the issues of heart to hard bargaining facts. Louisa makes it very clear to her father that she is not in love with Bounderby but the way her father uses 'Facts of this case' to justify the decision and suitability of marriage is a social commentary on the devastating effects of the mechanized values on human relations. Gradgrind advises his daughter to consider the question of marriage as she has been accustomed to consider 'every other question, simply as one of tangible fact.'

'Now, what are the Facts of this case? You are, we will say, in round numbers, twenty years of age; Mr Bounderby is , we will say in round numbers, fifty. There is some disparity in in your respective years, but in your means and positions there is none; on the contrary, there is a great suitability. Then the question arises, Is this one disparity sufficient to operate as a bar to such a marriage? In considering this question, it is not unimportant to take into account the statistics of marriage , so far as they have yet been obtained, in England and Wales. I find on reference to the figures, that a large proportion of these marriages are contracted between parties of very unequal ages...The disparity I have mentioned, therefore, almost ceases to be disparity, and (virtually) all but disappears.'(85)

Seen strictly in the light of facts, nothing can be plainer than this that the fact of a marriage proposal by a rich man should be returned with another fact of plain acceptance without going into any other matters of heart and mutual love for each other. As Grandgrind 'with his unbending , utilitarian, matter-of-fact face ' hardened her daughter to accepting this proposal , her candid confessions about being totally ignorant of the experiences and fancies of heart expose, in no uncertain way, the brutal assaults of the industrial and utilitarian values on the innocent minds: " 'What do I know, father,' said Louisa in her quiet manner,' of tastes and fancies; of aspirations and affections; of all that part of my nature in which such light things might have been nourished?" (87) Needless to say, that the solemnization of marriage business was 'all Fact, from first to last.' A precious sentiment as love, on all occasions, was dehumanized to 'a manufacturing aspect' in the form of bracelets, dresses and jewellery.

Louisa, as expected, is unable to adjust to the whole situation after marriage for long and happens to fall into the trap of an extra-marital relationship with another acquaintance James Harthouse, though whether she loves him or not is as unclear to the readers as to her own confused self. Yet one thing that is very clear by now is this that her father's philosophy and teachings are not going to save her from the impending disaster: "Now, father, you have brought me to this. Save me by some other means!' Her human appeal is enough to crush the 'pride of his heart and the triumph of his system' to 'an insensible heap', as he is at last led into rethinking and revising his selfish and irrational ways of the factual world: 'Some persons hold that there is a wisdom of the Head, and that there is a wisdom of the Heart. I have not supposed so; as I have said, I mistrust myself now. I have supposed the Head to be all-sufficient. It may not be all-sufficient...' (191) This significant realization on the part of Gradgrind, especially, as a father, serves an important purpose in the novel, that of bringing to the fore the severe limitations of the hard headed philosophy and teachings of the system that does not encourage imaginative and human instincts. The failure of Louisa's marriage –arranged by her father on 'the strong dispassionate ground of calculation and reason' –

intertwines with the novel's criticism of the industrial system and together the two themes "articulate the private and the public dimensions of Dickens' critique of a philosophical system that privileges facts over the imagination, quantitative value over the reality of experience, profit and production over the more intangible human qualities." (Sambudha Sen, 2001)

On the contrary, the relationship that Sissy enjoys with her father working in a circus is based on such strong ties of love and understanding that she does not harbour any ill will against him even after he has deserted her to some unknown destination. While people like Gradgrind and Bounderby look down upon her father as 'a runaway rogue and a vagabond', Sissy, though a child, can understand her father's compulsions that he has gone away 'for her sake' and never even once doubts his goodness: " 'O my dear father, my good kind father, where are you gone? You are gone to try to do me some good, I know! You are gone away for my sake, I am sure. And how miserable and helpless you will be without me, poor, poor father, until you come back!'"(35) She always carries with her the bottle of nine oils which her father had asked for before leaving the world of circus and is convinced that her father would one day come back to her. Even while staying with the Gradgrinds, she constantly occupies herself with the world of fancy and imagination as is clear from one of her seemingly 'absurd' answers to her teacher in the school. Sissy, who is reported to possess a 'very dense head' for facts and figures, is once asked: 'What is the first principle of this science?' And she innocently replies: "To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me." Since, for Sissy, love and compassion for human beings occupies the foremost place, she in spite of class divides, is able to establish such a close relationship with Louisa and her younger sister, is able to confront and persuade rich and sophisticated Harthouse to leave Louisa alone and facilitates Tom's escape with the help of her circus contacts.

The cold and calculative philosophy with regard to human relationships results in many unhappy marriages in the novel which include Mrs Gradgrind, Stephen Blackpool, Louisa and others. Stephen, a good powerloom weaver and 'a man of perfect integrity' sums it up all when entrapped in a terrible marriage with his degenerate wife, and unable to get rid off her in the form of a divorce, he says: 'Tis a muddle!' Thus it is that Stephen and Rachael are not able to unite with each other in spite of their intense love and deep commitment for each other. Louisa is at a loss to understand how to carry on with her loveless marriage with Bounderby and Mrs Grandgrind's complete indifference speaks of utter lack of communication. Stephen's last words before he dies are a grim reminder of the terrible human entrapments: " 'Ah Rachael, aw a muddle! Fro' first to last, a muddle!'...See how we die an no need, one way an another- in a muddle- every day!'" (231)

The kind of exploitation that is most prominently depicted in the novel relates to the dehumanizing relations between manufacturers and workers. The novel very sharply

exposes the utter callousness inherent in the quantitative and utilitarian values associated with the initial phase of the industrial revolution. Dickens' description of the town where the workers work and reside strikes the key-note with its proud tall chimneys, 'serpents of smoke', ashes, and above all, Coketown being 'a triumph of fact':

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but, as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled...It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next. (23)

The fictitious setting of 'Coketown', named after one of mining industry's most oppressive and destructive products 'coke'- a fuel made from coal, symbolizes the endless smoke and pollution that characterizes coal industry as well as the lives of the working class where everything from birth to death was severely mechanized and 'workful'. The habitants of Coketown, like the students churned out in the school factory, are left with nothing else to feed upon except the all pervading 'empire' of facts. The linkages between the monotony of educational and industrial life are too obvious to be overlooked:

Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen. (24)

Under the oppressive grind of facts, the existence of the workers is awfully reduced to mere factors of production- referred to as 'hands' like the parts of the machine that they mechanically work upon day in and day out. This could easily be afforded as the labour in nineteenth century was "generally a plentiful commodity and treated as such." (George 182) According to a business historian John Wilson, "the high levels of fixed investment in building and machinery evidently forced the industrialists to work assets as hard as possible in order to maximize returns." (John Wilson,1995: 32)

Masters of industry like Mr. Bounderby are so blinded with the motif of making as much profit as possible that even the smallest demand by the workers to improve

upon their terrible lot is interpreted by him as an undue attempt for wanting to be fed upon 'with a golden spoon: " as to our Hands. There's not a Hand in this town, sir, man, woman, or child, but has one ultimate object in life. That object is, to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon. Now, they're not a-going-none of'em- ever to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a golden spoon. (110). Bounderby's sole aim in life seemed to be concerned with somehow preventing these 'hands' to climb upwards in the social and economic ladder and keeping them confined, by hook or by crook, to an abject sub-human existence. Living in his own ivory town, he considers the factory work to be the 'pleasantest', 'lightest' and the 'best paid' work. The hunger for greed makes him and other mill masters interpret even the 'smoke serpents' emanating from the factory as the prosperous signs of wealth and profit and health for the body: "first of all, you see our smoke. That's meat and drink to us. It's the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs." (110) The factory smoke here represents the moral smoke screen that prevented these affluent mill owners from taking any notice of the miserable conditions under which the workers lived and survived. The exposure of Bounderby's own claims of social and economic mobility by none other than his own mother- Mrs Pegler , seem to suggest that in a phase dominated solely by self interests and profiteering, it is extremely difficult indeed for the working class to find a way out of their poverty and mechanization. Stephen Blackpool's falling into the abysmal pit of darkness – an 'Old Hell Shaft' and eventual death symbolizes the same 'muddle' from which it is difficult to escape.

Yet there are 'angels' in Coketown in the form of ever kind and gentle Rachael, Sissy and Sleary's circus entertainers staying in an inn called Pegasus Arms, with 'Pegasus' symbolizing a world of fantasy, creativity and amusement from which the proponents of industry like Bounderbys are so totally excluded.. Tom Gradgrind's wish to do away with the world of facts seem to echo with the desire of endless number of children whose childhood dreams and aspirations stand stifled due to the above regimentation:

'I wish I could collect all the Facts we hear so much about' said Tom, spitefully setting his teeth, ' and all the Figures, and all the people who found them; and I wish I could put a thousand barrels of gunpowder under them, and blow them all up together!'"(48)

Change in Gradgrind's philosophy and shift from Head to Heart is indeed 'another thing needful' that the novel so powerfully seems to underline. Though this 'enlightenment' was forced upon Gradgrind by Louisa and was not his own discovery, yet his realization of his mistakes in his system of education and upbringing of his children sends a positive message whereas Bounderby till the very last remains a typical 'Coketown man' suspicious of any kind of change whatsoever and clinging greedily to his same old philosophy that " when a man tells me anything about imaginative qualities, I always tell

that man, whoever he is, that I know what he means. He means turtle-soup and venison, with a gold spoon, and that he wants to be set up with a coach and six." (206-7) Bounderby's greed is in line with the words of Karl Marx : the ancients denounced money as subversive of the economic and moral order of the things. Modern society, which soon after its birth, pulled Plutus by the hair of his head from the bowels of the earth, greets gold as it Holy Grail, as the glittering incarnation of the very principle of life." (Karl Marx, 1982: 61)

Sleary's message to Gradgrind towards the end of the novel seems to sum up the whole critique of industrial system when he says: "People must be amused. They can't be always a learning, nor yet they can't be always a working, they aren't made for it." (248) With his emphasis upon the deep necessity of leisure, Dickens seems to say that there is absolute and urgent need to create spaces free from the 'iron regime' of an industrial system so as to encourage and sustain the spirit of creativity and imagination, which alone can guarantee the sustenance of human values and human world.

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