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A Glimpse of Victorian Society

Bhawna N. Gadhvi

Assistant Professor,

Govt. Arts & Commerce College, Liliya

and Research Scholar at B.K.N.M. University, Junagadh

Dr. Bipin R. Parmar

Research Supervisor,

B.K.N.M. University, Junagadh



Abstract:

The age was begun with the ascendancy of Queen Victoria as the Queen of England on 20th June 1837 and was lasted till 22nd January 1901. The Victorian Society had witnessed great fluctuations in all the fields of the life. It had observed the dark and grey side along with various bright aspects. The Victorian had envisaged the great architectural art, empowering and increasing middle class, distinct social strata and discrimination, religious reform and spiritual dilemmas, child labor and exploitation, moral complication, compartmentalization of families and inclination for nuclear families, role of women, political upheaval and rapid demographical transition.

Keywords: Industrialization, Urbanization, Moral Complicacy, Discrimination, Dilemmas



A Glimpse of Victorian Society

The Victorian age was considered as an incarnation of multiple reforms, democracy, urbanization, industrialization, colonial expansion and scientific discoveries. The age had displayed the industrial revolution, social vicissitudes and colonial empowerment accompanied with a plethora of reform bills. The age was begun with the ascendancy of Queen Victoria as the Queen of England on 20th June 1837 and was lasted till 22nd January 1901. The Victorian Society had witnessed great fluctuations in all the fields of the life. It had observed the dark and grey side along with various bright aspects. The Victorian had envisaged the great architectural art, empowering and increasing middle class, distinct social strata and discrimination, religious reform and spiritual dilemmas, child labor and exploitation, moral complication, compartmentalization of families and inclination for nuclear families, role of women, political upheaval and rapid demographical transition.

1. Class Discrimination and Complications of Lower-Classes in Victorian society

There were diverse shifts in the society due to several political and social reform. The society was divided into three class namely upper class, middle class and lower class with their own specifications and attitudes. The upper class included landowners, royal families and wealthy businessmen. They had the notion of superiority and dominance over other people of the society. The Middle class was immensely increasing in number due to the trend of urbanization and industries. It included shopkeepers and merchants who were also known as bourgeoisie. They were skillful and trained to earn money. Expansion of the cities was the outcome of increasing number of industries. Consequently, there was the demand of more labor and many workers. The middle class was further divided into two categories i.e. upper-middle class and lower-middle class. The exploited, unskillful and untrained class was the lower class of the society who was forced by the circumstances to work in most unhealthy, unsanitary and suffocated conditions. Even the women and children were compelled to work for long hours in the mines and factories. Many diseases were contaminated in such mines and factories. They were unable to get required food, sanitation, fresh water, necessary clothing, sufficient houses and proper education for survival and existence. Most of the factory workers and mill laborers were addicted to have alcohol and opium to fight the tiredness and hardships of their life. Children of the lower class were targeted by the situations to work as chimney sweepers, mill laborer, domestic servant and farm workers. Furthermore, such mines were infested with rats and diseases. Child labor was become the burning issue of the then society as they had to work 12 to 18 hours in such filthy places. Many casualties were occurred in such harsh coal mines as a result of the lack of ventilation and infections. Women of the lower-classes were forced by the occurrences and in lack of proper skill and education to being morally corrupt in order to manage their household responsibilities. Even the workhouses and orphanages which were established with



the intention to uplift and support poor and downtrodden strata of the society were become the hub of corruption and exploitation. The description of such condition was noticed in Charles Dickens' novel Oliver Twist and David Copperfield.

2. A Plethora of Political and Social Reforms Bills

The Victorian parliament had passed various social and political bills for the upliftment and betterment of the society. The Metropolitan Police Act, The Factory Act, The Reform Bills of 1832, 1867 and 1884, Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, The Municipal Corporation Act of 1835, The Civil Marriages Act, The Railway Act and The Mine Act, Food and Drug Act, The Education Act of 1876, The Married Women Property Act, Workmen's Compensation Act etc. had been passed by the parliament.

The Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 was passed to establish a centralized and unified system in civil unarmed police force. It aimed to remove the fear and violation among the people. To maintain law, peace and order in the society.

The Factory Acts of 1831, 1833, 1843, 1844, 1847, 1850, 1856, 1857, 1874, 1878, 1891, 1895, 1901 were passed to regulate the working hours and conditions for the workers. The Acts aimed to provide better ventilation, sanitation and guard of machinery to the workers and laborers. The working hours were decreased for children and women. It was regulated that women and children between the ages of 13 and 18 could work a maximum of ten hours a day or 58 hours a week. Even the working hours were decided for textile factories that it could be from 6a.m. to 6 p.m. or 7a.m. to 7 p.m.

The Reform Bills of 1832, 1867, 1884 were passed to reform the voting system of the country. It had extended the franchise and had included those who did not own landed property. It had removed the inequal representation. The bills were a crucial step towards democratization and more representation.

Such bills played a vital role in the development and enhancement of the society. Better sanitation and hygiene, women's rights and awareness, Compensation for workers in case of injury and death, prevention of adulteration of food and medicines, better arrangements for public health issues, regulation of corn prices, reformation in church by governing authorities, to abolish the slavery etc. reformative steps were taken by the government.

3. Great Discoveries and Innovation of the Victorians

The Age had viewed the great scientific discoveries and innovations such as locomotive engine, photography, electric light bulb, safety bicycle, postage stamps, paddle stamps, patrol, safety match, sewing machine, rubber tyres, steel, underground railways, typewriter, gramophone, comic book, x-rays, radio, kodak box camera etc. The inventions and



innovations had paved the way of industrialization and progress of the country. The colonial expansion had directed the British society towards empowerment and discoveries. The discoveries had thrilled the world. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was the first display of the great art and discoveries of the Great Britain. Unique innovations were showcased in the exhibition and photography was one of those. Queen Victoria was the first monarch who was photographed.

4. Rapid Industrialization and Urbanization

Constant development and prosperity were the result of rapidly booming various industries. It had provided employment and increased the income of the citizens of the country. The country was become the leading trading hub of the world. The textile industry was vastly flourished in the age. The age was described as the golden age by the historians for the progress and the reverberation. The railway was proved as a crucial path of benefits and advancement for the country. The supply of raw materials was facilitated by the water ways and railway lines from independent and colonial countries. The factories were contributing the workers with their necessities such as house, school, libraries and church. Even they were granted compensation in case of any accident on the work place. The invention of steel and patrol had furnished the divergent industries of the nation.

The outcome of the rapid industrialization was massive urbanization. People started to shift from rural setting towards urban areas. Consequently, the cities had become overcrowded and filthy. London was become the most populated city of the nation in the Victorian. The slum areas were surprising increased and crime rate was also enhanced. Lack of sanitation and hygiene were the burning issue of the health problems and contaminated diseases. The child labor was the overarching problem of the massively populated slum areas. Charles Dicken gave a picturesque description of the populated city, London and demonstrated the problem of underworld and crime in his novel, Oliver Twist. Kellow Chesney described the slum in these words, “ Hideous slums, some of them acres wide, some no more than crannies of obscure misery, make up a substantial part of the metropolis..... In big, once handsome houses, thirty or more people of all ages may inhabit in single room.”

5. Increased Rates of Education and Literacy

The advent of science and industrialization had increased the awareness of the people. Many schools were being established and the level of education was enhanced to cope with the changing situations of the time. Various education bills were passed to improve the status of education. Elementary education was made compulsory. Formal education was become the trend of the time to get lucrative service and status in the society. The easy access of books and magazines at lower cost was made it possible for nearly all the strata of the society to be educated . Though, people of cities were more conscious rather than the people of rural areas.



In subjects, mathematics and science were preferred over other subjects. There was biasness in the attitude towards women education. It was believed that women could not access the scientific and mathematical knowledge.

6. Victorian Notion of Nuclear Family and the Role of Women

With the advent of urbanization and city culture, there was an inclination towards nuclear family and privacy. The lack of place in urban areas directed people towards nuclear family. In the cities, there was lack of basic necessities of the life such as water, food and hygiene.

The role of the women was confined to home, care of children and specifically to fulfill the different religious and moral duties. It was believed that women should not do any business service and must maintain the cultural and moral dignity. Even the clothing of women was decided according to their role and strata in the society. It was believed that women must possess virtues like sympathy, kindness, love and care. Women were not allowed to get formal education in the society.

7. Elegant and Fashioned Victorian Buildings

There were some special features of Victorian buildings as the architectural art of Victorian society was much influenced by French and Gothic Art. It could be noticed in huge museums and elegant buildings. The Victorian buildings were used to be very colourful, ornated and of two or three stories. It had emerged as the fashion of the age to possess fashioned and decorated houses.

8. Religious Dilemmas and Doubts of the Victorian Society

Some of the writers had emphasized the rules of evolution and science in the origin of human race. Charles Darwin in his book 'On the Origin of Species' argued that human was the result of evolution journey. The book had shaken the existing faith in God. Various intellectual movement also thrilled the deep-rooted consideration of the people. Some questions were raised regarding the existence of God.

The Victorian society had seen the great shifts and fluctuations. It witnessed diverse happenings of the nation. Great discoveries and innovations were empowered the society whereas some overcrowded urban areas produced multiple problems. Many bills were passed for the betterment and upliftment of the society.



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