

A Tale of Two Cities as a Historical Novel *(BA Part 2 Eng Hons paper 4th 2018 21)*

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The 19th century novels particularly the novels of Dickens are a kind of social document that gives much information about society and policy. The entire framework of his novel *A Tale of Two Cities* has been interwoven against the backdrop of chaos and anarchy which characterized the 19th century English and French society. It centres around the social and political events taking place in London and Paris during and prior to French Revolution. Dickens draws unsettling parallel between the two cities describing abject poverty, appalling starvation, rampant crime, ruthless capital punishment and aristocratic greed. Based on the framework of a realistic novel, the entire narrative revolves round three aspects of life, resurrection marriage and death. Dr. Manette's release from the incarceration at Bastille is treated as resurrection since he enjoys life after remaining captive for 18 years. It also depicts the marriage of his daughter Lucie with Charles Darnay, the hero of the novel having royal lineage who raise a banner of protest for growing atrocity of the masses. Death is reflected in the act of sacrifice by Sydney to show his deep rooted affection for his beloved Lucie by ensuring a safe release of Darnay whom she loved dearly.

Dickens has made a vivid description of the turbulent period using his explicit technique to give a realistic colour to historical facts. He had a clear and explicit insight to give historical characters and events the realistic colouring in which he excelled his contemporaries. Humphry House has highlighted this unique feature of Dickens ' writing,

“But though he had little historical sense , he had a very acute sense of time...he went out of his way to indicate precise date and seasons of the year, and sometimes even used known historical facts to enforce the actuality of the movement”.

In *A Tale of Two Cities* Dickens has tried to portray events which the society witnessed in the aftermath of the two major events—the Industrial revolution and the French revolution. The society was marked by corruption and anarchy which reigned supreme of which Dickens has a very lively picture. It is said that his description of the French society was even more lively than that of English society. In order to make his description more poignant he took recourse to authentic sources He borrowed immensely from his contemporary Thomas Carlyle whom he had urged to suggest certain books for the awareness of the background of French Revolution and the later had provided him cartload of books from the London library. He derived from Carlyle’s book *French Revolution; A History* his emphasis on accurate details and realistic characters. In the preface to his novel *A Tale of Two Cities* he has owed his allegiance to Carlyle,

“It has been one of my hopes to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to the Philosophy of Carlyle’s wonderful book.”

Dickens was also influenced by the romantic novelist Walter Scott and has time and again expressed his indebtedness to Scott in his diary who mastered the art of historical novels,

“In Scott’s *Diary* I have been looking at this morning .there are thoughts which have been mine by day and by night.”

Dickens’ has successfully recast the condition of French Revolution through his characters since he is of the opinion that it is the man who directs the events in every field of life, not the events which direct the action of man in life. Even the minor characters of the novel like Madam Defrage express their commitment to take to the streets to give a fitting reply to the atrocities practised against the masses who have been relegated to the status of paupers.

