

Dickens's Neutral Philosophy of the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities*

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Abstract—This paper delves into Charles Dickens's objectivity of the events of the French Revolution and his unique stand and transparency in his representation for the two great power rivals and their prolonged conflict. The pre-revolutionary period was remarkable for the tyranny, cruelty, Socioeconomic-Inequality, and Subjugation of the Barbarous aristocratic rule against the masses. Conversely, the post-revolutionary period underwent sweeping social and political chaos and the form of administration set after the revolution was not a democracy, as French people were fond of calling it, but a mischievous and shameful anarchy lasted from 1789 until 1799. This discussion is an attempt to analyze and sort out a complex of hostile relationships involving the aristocrats and the peasants of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens' universal appeal indicates that whoever is in authority, aristocracy or masses, will get lavishly tempted to practice their full power depressingly and be obsessed with the dilemma of the establishment of the supremacy and dictatorship at any cost ignoring other's right in decent life, freedom, and equal opportunity. As the novel advanced, oppression is shown to breed oppression; violence to beget violence, evil to provoke evil. Instead of progress there is something more like the catastrophic continuum and piling wreckage upon wreckage.

Index Terms—French Revolution, France, *A Tale of Two Cities*, aristocrats, peasants

I. INTRODUCTION

The French Revolution was an epoch of sweeping social and political turmoil in France that lasted from 1789 until 1799 during spreading out of the French Empire. The impact of The French revolution can be powerfully perceived in the light of statement of some scholars who argue that the ideas of the French Revolution toured the globe. In other word, the lessons taken from the revolution changed radically the political and the social outlook and inspired new secular hope among the people in all over the world. The Revolution toppled the Empire, set up a state, went through critical periods of turmoil and extreme crisis, and finally ended up in another form of dictatorship, sadly, under the fake ironical label of equality, liberty and fraternity. Magnit (2006) argues that the French Revolution is a "movement ostensibly directed against despotism culminated in the establishment of a despotism far more complete than that which had been overthrown" (Magnit, 2006, P.6). Motivated by enlightened and neutral thoughts, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) is one of Dickens' most powerful works, set in London and Paris before and during the French Revolution. Dickens perceived the identical elements of forces that caused the uprising in addition to the tyranny and turbulence taking place in England during his time. Although he was in favor of the idea of people revolting against dictatorship, the turmoil that challenged the French Revolution evidently disturbed him (Marie, 2000). The novel portrays the dilemma of the French people oppressed by the French aristocracy in the years leading up to the rebellion as well as the parallel violence established by the revolutionaries toward the past aristocrats in the early years of the uprising. The principles depicted in *Tale of two Cities* that the French should persistently and constantly struggle for liberty, equality, and brotherhood. But, this struggle and anger against the aristocrats have been dreadfully misused and utterly transformed into retribution and loathing leading up to another tragedy of massacres, bloodsheds and chaotic mobs. Throughout the novel, Dickens' neutrality was obvious showing both power rivals-the aristocrats and the peasants- and their long-term quarrel, hatred, hostility which led up to desperate, devastating and tragic consequences.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The 1789 revolution significantly marks a new age in the history of Human civilization. The feudal order, the absolute monarchy and the Roman Catholic Church were entirely collapsed through radical transformation of the society. The French Revolution is the last important event in the western history as the masses, that to say, the millions of ordinary people, begin to take part in politics and, to take their lives and fates in their own hands. It is comprehensible as much as necessary that the revolution liberated mental power of mankind from the shackle of gloomy ages, that the change strengthens the triumph of the innovative age of renaissance by incorporating religion among the topics matter of human disputes. It lends a hand to the whole European nations to leave behind the era of the absolutism and aristocratic privilege and welcome the era of the citizenry as new leading force. Hegel (1965), one of the greatest philosophers of all time, was profoundly influenced by the French Revolution. He considers the French Revolution as a turning point in the history of mankind especially when he linked the French Revolution in its natural orientation with the entire history of the globe. He argues that the principles of the French Revolution prevailed almost in all over the world and gave the world new and different concept of life as all the nations and

Roman Catholic world –specially in Italy.Spain.French-were under the subjugations and power of the broadmindedness and free thinking. Despite its frustrations, despite all of its offenses and wrongdoings, the French Revolution was an incredibly great and a magnificent event. It did have an influential contribution to elevate the human race from the dictatorship and humiliation of the dark medieval ages. The people were enthusiastically pushed forth to revolutionary violence undermining the prevailing concepts of slavery, Subjugation, and Socioeconomic-discrimination. The French Revolution not merely changed the political supremacy, but it totally altered the inner existence of the state. For these cruelties, the uprising replaced a structure which is highly satisfied with equal opportunity as it matches the requirement of our aspiring modern age. It replaced the institutional regulation in the position of individual random rule, equitableness in that of dispensation; brought men from the divisions of caste system, the farming lands from the fence of provinces, business from the grips of prosperous people, farming from feudal exploitation and the coercion of tithes, and delivered everything to the condition of one nation, one system of law, one united people. When a change has turned out to be compulsory, and its time for achieving it has come, nobody is capable of interrupting it, everything promotes it. The French revolutionaries toppled the king, church, aristocracy and brought bread to poor, democracy to France and establish new whole order society. Those aspiring people were looking eagerly for attaining what they truly wanted, revolutions would then be quietly influential, and the historians would find no difficulties, no disasters to prove and record; they would only have to demonstrate the transitional critical point in the history of humanity to a better, wiser, freer, and more contented situation. Additionally, it is worthy to mention that the revolution was preceded by the ideological enlightenment principles. The followers of the enlightenments were the most struggling fighters against the feudal regulations. They considered the reason as the soul and the fuel of the revolution and the rational government should be the alternative of arbitrary rule and anything against reason should be inevitably collapsed. During 18th century, People started to question the authority and mock at any information or order giving from above either by the ruler or priest or any higher authority. Therefore, the people realized that the time has arrive to undermined the ideas that say aristocracy is natural, nobility should be dignified, and hierarchy is inherited. The popular coffee houses were substantial places for intellectual debates and activities as the people from all walk of life came together to discuss and exchanges their visions about the considerable ideas including reason, nature, happiness, progress and liberty. The peasants and the laborers who were desperately suffering from the hardship of life and low income were strongly influenced with ideas of those thinkers. According to William (1982), the enlightened principles dispersed among the people in the second half of the 18th century provoked their bitterness and impelled their rational intellect. The people went through dispute and concentrated discussion ranging from everyday common matters to the elevated standard of political attitude. The journals, salons, libraries, the reading societies and clubs played a very significant role in spreading the thoughts of thinkers among the common people. But the French Revolution was unfortunately illustrious for its complexity and contradiction in dealing with the affairs of the new state, its people and the diplomatic relationship with other countries. The authors of the revolution sought to get rid of everything related to the medieval age and used the violence, under the name of revolution, to purge and destroy the old aristocratic regime and its followers. The apostles of democracy instituted despotism of terror, exerting to exterminate all those who were indulgent of the offenses of the privileged classes. The apostles of equality scattered flames and consternation to almost the whole European countries, and substituted the disorder and random to the continent instead of peace and stability. The representatives of the fear secured neither age nor sex; neither the fame of distinguished achievement nor the unimportance of tedious weakness won mercy at their hands as nobody availed to save from the all-devouring guillotine. Every blossom, in such huge estates has been showered with the moans and tear of suffering hearts; every rock in these gigantic masses of constructions were constructed with human tragedy. “Louis XVI. Was paid for the hubris of Louis XIV.; the nobles paid for the pleasures which their forefathers had so carelessly enjoyed; the privileged classes for the privileges which they had usurped and had so grievously misused” (Megnet, 2006, p.8). The leaders of the Revolution followed values, the values articulated in three expressions, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. In order to achieve their lofty standard of dignity and success, they had to undermine past, erect the present and establish their vision for the future. The authors of the Revolution, who encompassed men and woman, moved backward and forward between the two extremes of tyranny and anarchy, diminished from gaining the path of victory and their mission has been left behind unfulfilled. Their dreams were somehow far from attaining the requirement of recognition; they launched no arena of perfect grace; they created no Utopia. But their toil was not in futile. Therefore, The revolution and its enlighten ideas were sharply criticized by some leading philosophers and critics including English famous critic Edmund Burk. He discredited 1789 revolution in his book *Reflection on the Revolution in France* as he damned the revolution and all its principles and ideology. His attack focused on the notion of social change and the deconstructive consequences of such change. The French revolution, thus, created controversy and prolonged philosophical debates among writers, critics and scholars due to its complex consequences on France and on the whole world. Its universal changes were massive; some were broadly accepted and others were resentfully challenged up to the late 20th century and have been regarded as a example for most of revolutions worldwide, despite the fact that the cost, in lives, was high.

III. ARISTOCRATS VS PEASANTS OF A TALE OF TWO CITIES: BLOOD FOR BLOOD

A. *Tale of Two Cities* was written in late fifties of nineteenth century when Dickens' creativity was at its peak. At that time, the British industry and capitalist economy also grew rapidly. Ills of capitalist progress, the poverty and the suffering of working class made the British society sinking on the verge of a social uprising. There was all-encompassing anger and dissatisfaction among masses and their rebellious sentiment triggered on the threshold. Accordingly, Dickens, who was the most celebrity author of his day and well-known for his contribution in social reform, wrote *A Tale of Two Cities*, which was basically about the French Revolution, to severely condemn the 19th century British and to provide reference for contemporary Britain. Dickens, in his philosophy of the French Revolution, sent two powerful neutral messages. The first

message was for the privileged classes of the British society indicating that the impoverishment and the hardship of the lower classes went through was unbearable and must come to an end and the social reform and equality should be instant and rapid. The second message was sent to the masses of the lower classes which implies that the common people should be sober, tolerant, and kind-hearted in case they revolt against the monarchy and the other privileged groups of classes and shouldn't repeat the same errors committed by the French people during the French Revolution. In the opening of the book, Dickens uses the lines "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness..." (Dickens, 1859, P.4) to articulate the dualistic nature of his time as it has some identical aspects with France during the French revolution. The French revolution was one of the most greatest events in the history, and its influence was extremely powerful during Dickens's time. *A tale of two cities*, therefore, was written in a very crucial and historical moment in which most incidents relied on a massive history of the French Revolution written by Dickens's famous historian friends Thomas Carlyle. Yet Dickens's viewpoint on revolution is significantly different from that of Carlyle. Contrasting with Carlyle, he did not witness virtue or fairness in the violence. His voice was ranging from being too compassionate with the revolutionary, to a feeling of dissension with their means of revolting. Throughout the novel, Dickens depicts his neutrality through the constant hostility and conflict between the privileged aristocratic classes and the third-state classes in a series of explicit descriptions. The Second part of the book is mainly concerned with the rotten and deteriorated condition of Pre-revolutionary France. Depiction of the arbitrary administration was significantly noticeable through the representation of a neglectful and uncaring government. For example, Monseigneur, a powerful aristocrat of at the court, owns himself four cooks to prepare chocolates for him at the time when the country was economically and politically depreciated. Instead of dedicating his time to the progress of the country and paying attention for its crisis, he wastes his time in the theater in the company of charming ladies. The military leaders and officials are completely incompetent and have no familiarity with the military affairs. Government officials are poorly unqualified and ignorant of the state affairs. Doctors are mainly occupied in curing the minor diseases of the aristocratic ladies and the architects are busy in building the castles and palaces (Saravanan, 2014). Consequently, the peasants experienced a desperate and tragic time and found themselves marginalized and oppressed due to such corrupt aristocrats and their arbitrary rule. The common people, miserably, underwent through Socioeconomic Inequality during the pre-revolutionary France. This period was illustrious for its distinctions of classes, barriers of provinces, feudal subjection, the oppression of tithes, and impediment of entails against the peasants by the privileged classes from the clergy men, noble people and aristocratic family. Dickens, in his book, utilizes irony, graphic description, and satire to highlight the social/economic inequality among the French people. Such inequality is exposed by Dicken's satirical portrayal of the standard of living of Monsignor's luxuries and the other members of the royal family. On the other hand, the poor people wretchedly suffer to the degree that they lay down to the ground to drink the wine that is accidentally spilt on the street. The reaction for the hunger and the begging of the people is too tough and inhumane by the marquise as his brutal reaction is to allow the people eat the grass; the people have nothing to eat but onions and struggle for survival while the aristocrats enjoy the luxury of life upon the people's toils. Evremonde family, who represents the aristocrats and the nobility in the novel, strongly believes that the humiliation and disgrace are the only effective means to deal with the peasants. Therefore, Doctor Manette's personal story with The Evremondes culminates such callousness and ruthless attitude of the royal family. They destroy the future of one families ruthlessly through raping a poor peasant girl, wounding her brother, then summoning Manette to treat their victims. When Manette attempts to condemn such aggressive behavior and makes a report about this genuine tragedy, he is imprisoned in the Bastille for over 17 years. Accordingly, He writes a full account of his experience-damning the Evremondes to the last of their race-and hides this personal history in his cell. Manette's experience proves that the royal family has absolute authority, and any information of their activities might bring serious risk: "The things that you see here," the Marquis cautions young Manette, "are things to be seen, and not spoken of" (Dickens, 1859, P.311). As a result The horrible incidents Manette explains, few examples of the larger stories, provoke the major events of French Revolution. The rape itself horribly indicates social and disgrace against common people and natural consequences of the absolute power. besides, The smoldering dissatisfaction in Saint Antoine where people live in wretched poverty deepens when the carriage of the marquis runs over a child and murders him horribly. Then Evremonde considers, "repression is the only lasting philosophy. The dark deference of fear and slavery, my friend, observed the Marquis, will prevent the dogs obedient to the whip, as long as this roof, facing up to it, shuts out the sky" (Dickens,1859, P.142). Conversely, while the French peasants' motives for revolting were completely reasonable, and the French Revolution was extensively eulogized for its substantial principles of "Equality, Liberty, and Fraternity", Dickens takes a more different view. He believes that the classical habits of subjugation and absolutism are no longer advantageous and provoke extreme anger among the people, and that much tyranny and much depression certainly trigger rebellion, but, unfortunately, when the revolution starts off, The writers believes that it is extremely brutal and that the less violence the better as he desires that people should show tolerance and harmony as a substitute of severe detestation. (Na Li, 2013). By viewing how the revolutionaries employ oppression and violence to further their own self-interested and vicious ends in the name of freedom and liberation from the absolute power of aristocratic monarchy, Dickens indicates that whoever is in authority, aristocracy or masses, will get lavishly tempted to practice their full power harmfully. *A Tale of two cities*, in other word, fundamentally demonstrates that while despotism will inescapably lead to revolution, revolution will lead just as unavoidably to despotism. Consequently, the oppression was among the key issues raised by the revolutionary people of French. "No one could deny that the Revolution had produced momentous and lasting changes. The Europe of the *ancien régime* had been destroyed and all attempts to restore it had foundered. But these changes appeared to be indivisible from the violence and despotism that had brought them about" (Jones, 2009, p.526). The mass violence and the bloodshed, it occurred, had never been accidental, but inseparable in its oriented and inherent nature. Albert (1978) argues that While the social exploitation of Defarge's family demonstrates the cruelty of the individual powerful people, Madame Defarge, accordingly, turn beauty into power and violence, finally into terror" (Albert,1978). Her retribution is extremely dreadful because it reverses the sister's misery and suffering -or, more generally, the implicit passivity of the

French peasants. She is more callous than her husband; her close follower is a woman who has thirst for blood and revenge; and the most horrible figure of all is "the figure of the sharp female called La Guillotine" (Dickens, 1859, p. 259). Hence, the revolution is overwhelmingly teeming with cruelty and senseless deaths. People are stabbed in the streets, shot down in cold blood, and executed at the hands of tyranny. There is no sense of the vulgarity of it all, as families take ringside seats at beheadings as if it were a sporting event, cheering as each head is separated from its body. The guillotine, a mammoth mechanism for killing that was decreed at the time in France as the instrument to be used for all executions, takes on a character of its own (Davis, 2004). Regrettably, instead of replacing order and peace, the early years of revolution had been so devastatingly horrible, and its traces had been a memorable moment of trouble events of the smoldering of castle, of the storming of the Bastille, of irritated masses, of the killing of the emperor and his queen, and most of the top leaders of the Revolution itself, of the horror and the killing machine the guillotine, of women having the ferocity of tigers and the violation of the inviolability of churches. According to Mysam (2014), Dickens profoundly describes the rebellious moments for revolutionaries where the hostility and revenge only lead to massacre and more despotism. Interestingly, the revolutionaries were ignorant of a constitution and demanded a republic without real understanding of the republic requirements. Therefore, once the French Revolution started, it turns into series of frantic chaos disturbing the calmness and stability of the people. This reality has been mostly described in chapters "Echoing Footsteps", "The Sea Still Rises", and "Fire Rises" (May, 2008). Through underlining some horrible incident in the novel, such as storming of the Bastille, Mass massacres of the Aristocrats including innocents, never-ending Chaos, merciless beheading of the enemies through the rapid fall of the guillotine, Dickens brilliantly concludes the heavy price the French revolutionaries had paid for their revolution. The author firmly believes that The hostility, anger, and revenge involving the Aristocrats and the peasants are almost the substantial reasons that renders the revolution even more violent, destructing, and obliterating. Sorry to say, what began as a revolution that stood up for the poor and unprivileged, turned into mass terror and obsessed hostility.

IV. CONCLUSION

Though Thomas Carlyle's history of the French Revolution is an important source for *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens's historical and socio-political dimension is elliptical and suggestive. By the time of his death, *Tale of Two cities* was powerfully on the way to being recognized as Dickens' most extensively published and popular work. It has become an icon of the French Revolution. Its focus concerns with the condition of 18th century European socio-political turmoil and its consequences and Dickens's appropriate and neutral response of the relationship involving the so-called aristocratic community and peasants. The pre-revolutionary period was depicted as an era which devastatingly based on Socioeconomic-Inequality, Tyranny, and Subjugation of the Barbarous aristocratic rule against the masses. The post-revolutionary period, nonetheless, demonstrated disappointingly how pointless the revolution has become when the substantial goal of equality has been lost and replaced by chaos, anarchy and violence. The fierce response of the well-pointed gun and an answering of violence with violence sadly culminated in more destruction and catastrophe that lasted for long period of time. The sequence reactions of brutal coercion and violent insurgence have gone through beyond human control, and in this ferocity all distinctions of individualism and even gender are submerged. Thus, my study concluded that the entire imaginative power of the writer has been successfully dedicated to illuminate his universal concept regarding the hostile relationship involving the classes and its catastrophic consequences.

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