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# EDUCATION TODAY

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# Mirroring of Childhood and Child-Labour in Dickens' *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*

Dr. Madhura A. S.\*

## ABSTRACT

Though not a theoretician or a philosopher of education, Charles Dickens, the British novelist responded to the inescapable influence of his nightmarish childhood and the Victorian age on him. There are portraits of over forty children, either orphans or others who are going to school in fourteen of his novels. Perhaps Charles Dickens' contribution to education of his time was much more than Matthew Arnold or Carpenter. This paper proposes to examine how Dickens' imagination portrays a dangerously unsheltered childhood in great 'ugly cities' of London and Coketown with something of a nightmarish poetic quality of the Victorian age. This paper will investigate *David Copperfield*, a huge autobiographical work filled with characteristic Dickensian touches that would cover Dickens' own childhood in *Blacking Warehouse* and *Hard Times*, which even Dr. Leavis F.R. conceded as a classic as well as a sunless book that captures the portrait of children savagely manipulated by the impact of die-hard Utilitarianism of the times. While taking cognizance of existing criticism, the paper will document how Dickens' comic irony and indictment emerges from his astonishing portraits of children like *David Copperfield*, *Tommy Traddles*, *James Steerforth*, *Bitzer* and *Cecilia Jupe*. The paper will concentrate on the relevant details from *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*, with a clear focus on the 'Why and How' of his portraits of childhood in these two novels. It will be critical and analytical rather than merely historical or descriptive so as to bring out the novelistic genius in Dickens. His abiding sympathies and social conscience that have made him a classic with an enduring appeal perhaps next only to Shakespeare and Milton but of course after The Bible.

**Keywords:** theoretician, nightmarish childhood, Victorian age, utilitarianism, savage

*"The scars left from the child's defeat in the fight against irrational authority are to be found at the bottom of every neurosis - Erich Fromm (Man for Himself)"*

The world has seen a cavalcade of educationists from Socrates to Deepak Chopra, Aristotle to John Dewey, who have theorized a great deal on the process of giving a child a gentleman's education or a girl, a training to become a cultured lady with fine sensibility. After the birth of the novel with Richardson's *Pamela*, there have been many novels that traced the development of a child from innocence to experience. But few novelists have reached the peak achievements of a writer like Charles Dickens. In capturing in fiction the nightmarish influence of childhood and mind-boggling social realities of the Victorian age.

James L. Hughes in his book, *Dickens as an Educationist* introduces Dickens like this:

*"He was essentially a child trainer rather than a teacher. In the twenty-eight scholars described in his writings, and in the training of his army of little children in institutions and homes, he reveals*

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\*Assistant Professor of English, Department of Studies and Research in English, Karnataka State Open University, Mysore-570006.