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INTRODUCTION

"We had always been convinced that Victorianism was a myth, engendered by the long life of the sovereign and of her most illustrious subjects. We were constantly being told that the Victorians did this, or the Victorians thought that, while my own difficulty was to find anything on which they agreed: any assumption which was not at some time or other fiercely challenged. 'Victorian History'

The 19th century was one of rapid development and change, far swifter than in previous centuries. During this period England changed from a rural, agricultural country to an urban, industrialised one. This involved massive dislocation and radically altered the nature of society. It took many years for both government and people to adjust to the new conditions.

The **Victorian era** of the United Kingdom was the period of Queen Victoria's rule from June 1837 to January 1901. The era was preceded by the Georgian period and succeeded by the Edwardian period. This was a long period of prosperity for the British people, as profits gained from the overseas Empire, as well as from industrial improvements at home, allowed a large, educated middle class to develop. The era is often characterized as a long period of peace and economic, colonial, and industrial consolidation, temporarily disrupted by the Crimean War.

The main purpose of our project is to investigate the period of Queen Victoria's reign and to find its advantages and disadvantages. In our project we would like to pay the main to the life of children in Victorian times .

QUEEN VICTORIA

She was born on the 24th of May 1819. On 10th June 1837, following the death of her uncle, William IV, she became queen at the age of eighteen. She fell instantly in love with her German cousin, Prince Albert and they were married on 10th February 1840. Between 1841 and 1857 Queen Victoria had nine children - four sons, five daughters. Prince Albert was very interested in art, science and manufacturing and took a keen interest in the building of the Crystal Palace. He died suddenly of typhoid in 1861. His widow was overcome with grief and wrote in her diary, "My life as a happy person is ended!" She wore black for the rest of her life. For a long time she refused to appear in public, which made her very unpopular. Queen Victoria died aged 80 on 22 January 1901 and a new age - the Edwardian - began.

POLITICS

The English government under the rule of Queen Victoria was a monarchy which also comprised of a Parliament. The Parliament was a Bicameral legislature which consisted of The House of Lords and The House of Commons. The said houses would meet separately and passed a bill as law by majority votes. However, for the bill to be passed, it was necessary that both the houses assent to it. The members of the House of Lords were not elected by public voting and a Lord Chancellor was appointed to supervise its activities. On the other hand, the members of the House of Commons were elected by public voting. In the initial years of the Victorian period, there were two strong political parties, The Whigs and the Tories (Conservatives). These were the first political parties in England who dominated the political field throughout the Victorian reign.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The traditional society of the Victorian period was divided into the- Upper Class, Middle Class and the Working Class. Initially the Upper Class was the superior class having power and authority to dominate the other two classes. But with the Industrial Revolution, the gap between the Upper Class and other two classes reduced remarkably. The living conditions of the middle class improved and some of them were also regarded as rich and wealthy. Working class comprised of skilled and unskilled workers who had to work hard to fulfill their needs and were exploited by others.

RELIGION

Victorian England was a deeply religious country. A great number of people were habitual church-goers, at least once and probably twice, every Sunday. The Bible was frequently and widely read by people of every class; so too were religious stories and allegories. Yet towards the end of Queen Victoria's reign, the hold of organized religion upon the English people began to slacken for several reasons.

POPULATION

Between 1801 and 1871 the population of the UK doubled. Migration in both directions was a feature of Victorian life. Many Britons left the UK for America or the colonies in search of a better life. The Irish poor formed a large number of these migrants, especially after the Irish potato famine: the Irish moved in large numbers to England and Scotland, as well as abroad. Within the UK as a whole, people moved from the countryside into the new industrial cities to find work. Migrants from across the world also settled in Britain, notably Jews from Europe and Russia.

CHANGE IN THE CONDITION OF STATUS OF THE VICTORIAN WOMEN

Industrial Revolution attributed to the change in the status of women. According to the traditional family pattern, the women were supposed to look after the household chores and take care of children while the men would earn money. There was a strong presence of male dominance in the society. Women were to obey what men told them to do. The revolution gave women an opportunity to work and earn money, thus changing the old beliefs. Working women not only shared the burden of earning money but it also gave them a sense of security. Their lives were no longer restricted to the house and children. The segregation of large families into nuclear ones also added to the change in the women's lives.

FASHION

The women's fashion saw radical changes throughout the Victorian era. The gowns worn by early Victorian women were narrow with sloping shoulders. The very pattern of the gown made it difficult for the women to move. Also, they had to wear layers of corsets and petticoats. This changed in the later years when light gowns were made, making it a little comfortable for women to wear them. However, throughout the Victorian reign, it was prohibited for a woman to reveal her ankles as it was considered to be scandalous. Men's fashion on the other hand saw slow changes in case of neckties, day coats, evening coats, waistcoats, etc. The dresses worn by both boys and girls were alike until they were five years old. However, their dressing style changed as they grew up. Children used to wear clothes made from cotton or wool that was found around the house. The children's dress had long or short sleeve depending upon the season.

CHILD LABOUR

Child labor was rampant throughout the period. A major reason attributing to it was the fact that the families did not earn much and the food prices had increased for certain duration. This made it difficult for the earning members to earn enough to buy food and satisfy the requirements of the family.

Also, the family structure comprised of grandparents, parents, children, aunts, uncles etc. The number of family members living together was burdensome. Thus, parents were forced to send their children to work and bring some more money. However, despite working for long hours, the children were under paid and as such their living conditions hardly improved.

During early Victorian times, poor children worked from the age of five to feed themselves and their families. These jobs were not easy and were often dangerous. Many children worked as chimney sweeps because they were small and thin. They

climbed up narrow chimneys to clean them. Street children or orphans usually did this job. A lot of children also worked in cotton factories. When the cotton threads broke, children went into the machines to fix them. This was very dangerous. Other children worked in coal mines. They pushed trucks of coal or they opened and closed doors to let air through tunnels. The masters were often cruel. Children worked long hours for very low wages. A lot of children had health problems and died in accidents.

WORKHOUSES

A workhouse was a place that sheltered the poor people who did not have the means of supporting themselves. These workhouses along with providing a place to live also gave work to the poor people. The workhouses were functioning under the Poor Law systems prevailing in England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

The workhouses had captured the imagination of the Victorian writers who termed this place as pauper palaces. In the workhouse men, women and children were kept in separate quarters. Such an arrangement was devastating for those children who were living in the workhouse with their parents.

The inmates were given a uniform which they had to wear during their stay at the workhouse. There were certain punishments set out by the Poor Law Commission for breaking the rules of the pauper house. The inmates were not permitted to talk to one another to maintain the discipline of the house. The workhouses had a staff consisting of a Master, a Matron, Chaplain, Medical Officer, School teacher and a porter. The workhouses provided education to the children. However, these children were made to work in factories and mines without their parents' knowledge. The working schedule in the pauper house kept the inmates busy throughout the day. The work included grinding animal bones, cooking, cleaning, vegetable cleaning, tailoring and many other things which were boring and hard for

the people living there. Also in most of the workhouses, the living conditions were such that increased the probability of the inmates suffering from depression. The conditions of the workhouses started improving during the 19th century. Also as the years passed the workhouses were occupied by orphaned children, old people, abandoned children, deserted wives, etc.

POOR CHILDREN

The life style of a child was decided on the basis of the house he was born in. If a child was born in a less fortunate home, things were difficult for the child. In their situation, children as small as three or five year old were employed by industrial units as they were important but cheap source of labor.

The children worked for long tiring hours in the factories doing hazardous jobs. Children, especially boys around the age of eleven or twelve years were employed to clean chimneys. The basic reason why children were driven to work and jeopardize their lives was because of the large families they lived in.

The number of people in the family who worked were less as compared to those who were dependent on the earning members. This made it further difficult to earn enough to satisfy everyone's need.

The miserable living condition forced these families to take any opportunity to make money. Thus, children were pushed into working to help the parents to earn money and support the budget of the family. Many people justified children's working as an act of helping those in dire need of money.

This attitude exploited the children rather than saving their innocent childhood. Even the Parliament was in favor of child labor. The conditions in which the children were kept were pathetic. After working for such long hours, there was no time for these children to go to school and obtain education.

This reduced the very importance of education from their lives. The tendency of people had become such that they wanted to earn money by doing any job. However, in 1870, Education Act made it mandatory for children between five to ten years of age to go to school.

In 1881 the Act was made applicable throughout the country. Many children took after school jobs to help manage the budget of their families. There were two common indoor jobs that children took- one was to work as a servant and the other was to be a sweet shop workers. Girls and Boys as young as eleven years worked as servants in peoples' homes.

CHILDREN AT SCHOOLS

At the start of the 19th century very few children went to school. Most poor children worked. If they went to school, their families lost the money they earned. There were some good schools for boys, for example, grammar schools and public schools. Only richer families could afford to pay the school fees, though some schools gave free places to poor boys. Poor girls did not go to school when the Victorian age began meaning they had little education. Girls from wealthy families would usually be taught at home by a governess. Sometimes, wealthy girls may have attended boarding schools too.

'Dame' schools were usually run by one woman. The 'dame' often did her best, but she was a child-minder not a trained teacher. Often quite poor herself, she took as many children as she could cram into her house. Poor parents working hard to earn a living paid her a few pennies a week to look after their children, and perhaps teach them the alphabet or how to sew. Most of the time, the children amused themselves and did not learn very much.

Sunday schools were run by churches, to teach children about the Christian faith. Journalist Robert Raikes started the first Sunday School for poor children in Gloucester in 1780.

Ragged Schools were schools for poor children. One of the first was started in Portsmouth by a shoe-mender named John Pounds. Older children helped to teach younger ones. Ragged Schools were often in one room of a house, or in an old barn. From 1833 factory owners were supposed to provide at least 2 hours education every day for child-workers, but not many children actually got lessons. Reformers campaigned for new laws to improve working conditions for children and give children the opportunity for schooling. In 1870 Parliament said there had to be a school in every town and village. 'School Boards' of local people built and ran the new schools. Families paid a few pennies a week to send their children, though not all children went to school. In the 1860s a farmer might pay 6 pence (6d) a week for each child. A labourer (who earned less) only paid 2d per child. By 1880, the law said that all children aged 5 to 10 must go to primary school, so every child would receive at least a basic education.

What was a Victorian classroom like?

There were maps and perhaps pictures on the wall. There would be a globe for geography lessons, and an abacus to help with sums. Children sat in rows and the teacher sat at a desk facing the class. At the start of the Victorian age, most teachers were men, but later many women trained as teachers.

Children wrote on slates with chalk. They wiped the slate clean, by spitting on it and rubbing with their coat sleeve or their finger! Slates could be used over and over. For writing on paper, children used a pen with a metal nib, dipped into an ink well.

What subjects did children learn?

Girls and boys learned together in primary schools, but were separated in secondary schools. Both boys and girls learned reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling and drill (PE).

Boys learned technology: woodwork, maths and technical drawing, to help with work in factories, workshops or the army when they grew up.

Girls had lessons in cooking and sewing, to prepare them for housework and motherhood.

Children were often taught by copying and repeating what the teacher told them. Lessons included teaching in right and wrong, and the Christian religion.

How were children punished?

Discipline in schools was often strict. Children were beaten for even minor wrongdoings, with a *cane*, on the hand or bottom. A teacher could also punish a child by making them stand in the corner wearing a 'dunce's cap'. Another, very boring, punishment was writing 'lines'. This meant writing out the same sentence (such as 'Schooldays are the happiest days of my life' 100 times or more.

Boys from rich families were sent away to boarding school. Some 'public schools', like Eton and Harrow, set high standards.

Other schools were awful places, run to make profits for the owners. Boys in these bad schools were half-starved, ill-treated, and taught very little.

Girls sent away to be trained as governesses were not much better off, as you can learn from reading *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte.

Girls and young boys were taught at home by a male tutor or a female governess. The first good girls' schools were started in Victorian times, such as the North London Collegiate School (1850).

CHILDREN AT PLAY

Where did Victorian children play?

Although many children worked in Victorian times, they still had time to play.

Outdoors, most Victorian children played in the street or in the fields and woods. Not many families had gardens big enough to play in, and there were no children's playgrounds. Rich families had playrooms or nurseries, but poorer children played wherever they could find space. With ten or more children often crammed into one or two rooms, play-space for poor families was a luxury. Playing outside was the usual escape.

In street games, children shared toys like hoops, marbles and skipping ropes, with friends in the street, or in the school playground. They played chasing games such as tag and played catch with balls. If they hadn't got a proper ball, they made balls from old rags, and bats from pieces of wood. They also played hopscotch. Victorian children were able to play out in the street as there was less traffic than today. There were no cars until the 1880s. They crowded around street musicians, wheeling a barrel organ, which played tunes when the handle was turned.

Sometimes barrel organ players had a monkey with them.

Books for children

Victorian children were often given books with improving moral lessons, about characters with names like Lazy Lawrence and Simple Susan. A favourite story was Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* about a badly treated chimney-boy. There were lots of books written specially for children, such as *Treasure Island* (about pirates) by R L Stevenson and *Black Beauty* (about a horse) by Anna Sewell. Perhaps the most famous Victorian children's book is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) written by Lewis Carroll.

Children's games

Children played outdoor chasing games such as tag (which had lots of other names, such as touch or tig), and others like *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, where one player (Tom) tries to catch anyone trespassing on his or her ground, shown by a

line. They also played a version of musical chairs, using cushions or old rags to sit on. At Easter, children played 'Egg-Shackling'. In this game, everyone put an egg with their name on in a basket or sieve, which was shaken until the eggs broke. The last egg left unbroken won.

Toys in rich homes

During the 19th century, factory-made toys, including tin toys and clockwork toys, went on sale. Rich children had more toys to choose from: train sets, toy soldiers, rocking horses, dolls and doll's houses, tea-sets and toy shops with toy fruit, vegetables, meat, hats and medicines. Other popular toys were alphabet bricks, sailing boats, jigsaw puzzles and Noah's Arks. In many homes, children were not allowed toys on Sundays - except Noah's Ark, because that was in the bible.

Toys in poor homes

Most Victorian toys were made of wood, paper or metal. There were no plastic toys. Poor children usually played with home-made toys. A clothes peg might be turned into a doll, and a lump of wood become a toy boat. A piece of rope could be used for skipping, and rags stuffed with sawdust might become a ball or an animal to cuddle. As a treat, families sometimes bought cheap factory-made toys from a 'penny stall' in the market.

CONCLUSION

According to the facts we got to know during our investigation the Victorian era had more advantages than disadvantages. It was the time of prosperity for the British people as a result of profits from overseas colonies and industrial revolution at home. The Victorian era was the time of great inventions, e.g. steam ships, railway, photography, advertising, postal stamps and tourism. Though, the population of England did almost double from 16.8 million in 1851 to 30.5 million in 1901. At the same time, around 15 million emigrants left the United Kingdom for the United States, Canada and Australia. In 1870, Basic State Education became free for every child under the age of 10.

Among the most serious disadvantages of that period we would like to notice the fact that the Victorian era was notorious for the employment of young children in factories and mines. Children as young as three worked for up to 16 hours a day. Working class (men and women who performed physical labor) was also paid low wages.

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