



DECIPHERING... “A CHRISTMAS CAROL” by CHARLES DICKENS

We are living in the era where entertainment whether in the form of literature or audio-visual most often comes in the form of series and sequel and are highly anticipated and applauded by the audience. It would not be unfair if a part of the credit goes to Charles Dicken. Charles Dickens was a great novelist of Victorian age who popularized the trend of publishing novels in the form of serials and this helped him to gain the popularity among his readers. It also created enthusiasm and suspense among the readers and brought him free publicity for his work as they were widely discussed among the public. Charles Dickens was a novelist, a critic and a writer of children’s literature. He designed some of the world’s best character that are remembered even today. He was one among very few writers who enjoyed great popularity during their life itself. His full name was Charles John Huffam Dickens. He was born in the city of Portsmouth, England. At the early age, he had to shoulder the family responsibility as his father was put behind the bars for non-payment of debts he had taken. This influence can be seen in his works. In spite of not having proper formal education he ruled a genre in literature for more than twenty year and wrote five novellas, fifteen novels, uncountable short stories, non-fiction articles and children’s literature.

Dickens was also known for his social reformatory works and through ‘A Christmas Carol’ he wanted to give Victorian society a message to reform itself which had become corrupted due to various elements like industrialization, urbanization etc. There is no doubt that Victorian age had witnessed a great amount of progress and is considered as golden age in the history of England. However, another face of this development depicts lack of basic human values among the people, the upper class was dissatisfied even though they had everything to enjoy. Rich had become blind towards the sufferings of their poor counterparts. Celebration of Christmas started losing its real value. Through ‘A Christmas Carol’ Dickens tried to highlight the real essence of Christmas celebration and conveyed message to the deteriorating Victorian society to realize basic human values and reform itself.

Main messages that A Christmas Carol carries are sublimed as under:

Contentment is a continual feast:

Victorian society was divided into three main groups based on the financial condition such as the upper class, the middle class and the lower class. The lower and the middle class public used to think that the upper class are happy, living a great life and have all the money they could want, but it was not always true. Studies have shown that having more money does not always mean more happiness. In 'A Christmas Carol', we see that Tiny Tim and his family were living in poverty but that does not stop them from being happy, even though Tiny Tim is crippled, but his disability does not let him down. Their happiness was based on being a family and being together. They never complain on their poor financial condition, the unfortunate situation of having their eldest daughter to work or why their child was born disabled. On the other hand, they were satisfied with meagre money they have to buy food, spending time with each other and making beautiful memories together. 'A Christmas Carol' teaches us to be content with whatever we have.

Importance of Charity:

Ebenezer Scrooge the main character around which the story of 'A Christmas Carol' revolves, was a miserly man who lives in a large house, which is depicted as old and deserted. Scrooge symbolizes the greedy and selfish Victorian upper class. He is a bitter man with lots of money but ends up living like a poor person, not out of necessity but out of greed. Scrooge may be wealthy but his wealth does not mean anything in comparison with Cratchit's and their happiness that they achieve through their bond and love. He had an opportunity to find happiness in his life, but he only sees the effort he had to put in. Dickens express his idea about charity through the character of Fred, when he says 'His wealth is of no use to him, if he doesn't do any good with it'. The Cratchits were not wealthy in the money matter, but they are wealthy in the matter of happiness, love and human values. They find happiness in small things. They emphasizes the main message of the story that, 'one has to do charity in order to find happiness in life'. In this way, Dickens criticizes the rich upper class of the Victorian society and gave message to them to be compassionate towards the poor and do charity.

Importance of Compassion and Humanity:

Scrooge lives in a large house with having huge wealth, but was unaffected by the needs and problems of the poor. He symbolizes the greedy and selfish Victorian upper class who have become materialistic and inhuman. In 'A Christmas Carol', Dickens portrays the large divide between the rich and the poor in British society, where the wealthy were only interested in their financial gain and the poor ended up in workhouses and debtor's prison. Dickens disapprove the terrible treatment given to children and advocated for child labour laws. Through the character "Tiny Tim" Bob Cratchit's son - a disabled young boy who was deprived of proper treatment and nutritious food due to the poverty in the family, Dickens avokes sympathy and compassion within his readers for the poor class of

the society, he also criticizes the upper class for their lack of private charity and the insufficient funding of the welfare system by the government. As the Victorian era progressed and the industrial revolution began, there was a growing difference between haves and have not. The wealthy were profiting from the growing industries while the poor went more into debt in just trying to feed their families. Moreover, the wealthy were inhuman towards the poor. This can be seen when Scrooge being rich was not ready to spend extra money to purchase coal to keep his office warmer, so that his clerk Bob Cratchit can work comfortably. In another incident, when two gentleman visit Scrooge's office the day before Christmas to ask for a donation as a charity to help the poor, Scrooge says 'Are there no prisons? And the union of workhouses? Are they still in operation?'. It means he wanted those poor to work in factories and workhouses, which were a place of horrible torture. The two men tried to explain that they showed up to Scrooge at that particular course of time mere with the hope and belief that people feel more willing to give and donate during Christmas season. But, Scrooge plainly ignored their appeal and insisted that he will not spend money on charity cases. Later in the end, with the visit of three ghosts and with the thought of a miserable end, Scrooge changes himself and decide to help the poor and indeed, he does. So through this character Dickens wanted to give a message to the Victorian upper classes that basic human values and compassion are very essential in life and appealed them to adopt these values and treat the deprived class in a good way.

Importance of friendship

'A Christmas Carol' gives us a message on friendship and its nature. Scrooge was a person who led an alien life away from the society without any friends and relatives. He had no friends except Jacob Marley. After his death, he remained alone. Marley and Scrooge were into money lending business and were very cruel towards their poor customers. Being friends, they should have guided each other on a right path but unfortunately, both indulge in wrong deeds. After the death of Marley, Scrooge continued the same business along with same harshness and cruelty towards the poor. After many years, the ghost of Marley visits Scrooge in order to warn him to correct himself and start helping the poor or else he will have to face the consequence as he is facing right now. Marley was forced to roam around the world being a ghost by carrying the heavy chains around his shoulders, which were the results of his sin. Each lock in the chain represents his sin. Being a true friend, he wanted to save Scrooge from the same destiny what he had. In this way, we can learn the value of true friendship that the character of Jacob Marley depicted in the Novella of "A Christmas Carol".

Importance of family

'A Christmas Carol' highlights the importance of family. Through Cratchit family, we learn that how love, compassion and respect towards each other in a family results in the eternal happiness. Even though the Cratchits

were poor and were struggling hard to meet their basic needs, eldest daughter was forced to work, Tiny Tim, the youngest son of the family was suffering from disability, we never see any regrets in that family. They were happy in what they have. Their Christmas Feast was very simple, but they were enjoying it together. It conveys the message of happiness in togetherness and help us to value the importance of the family.

When the ghost of Christmas past takes Scrooge to his childhood where, he was alone in a boarding school away from his family, only his little sister Fan used to visit him and take him back to home. In this way, we learn how much important role that a family plays in the life of a person. Throughout his life, Scrooge miss his family. Earlier Scrooge used to refuse the Christmas invitation of his nephew Fred. But, when the ghost of Christmas present takes him to the house of Fred, Scrooge realises that his nephew loves him a lot and miss him on the Christmas day. The very next day, a transformed Scrooge visited his nephew's house on Christmas, wishes him and enjoy the Christmas feast along with Fred's family. In this way, Scrooge gets back his family and learns its importance.

Importance of relations

Through the story of 'A Christmas Carol', Dickens very well portrayed the importance of relationships. Scrooge during his young days was in love with a girl called Belle. However, she broke her relation with him when she realized that Scrooge started giving more importance to wealth than her. Later, she married another man and lived happily. Now Scrooge regrets for the mistake, which he had committed. Similarly, Scrooge's nephew Fred used to invite him for every Christmas and every time he used to reject his invitation. When the ghost of Christmas present takes Scrooge to Fred's house, he realized that how much his nephew loves him. Then the next day converted Scrooge wishes everyone a Happy Christmas and sends a big turkey to Cratchits for feast, later he himself visits to his nephew's house and celebrate Christmas with him. Dickens also shows us that to remain happy, money is not essential, love among the family members is enough to lead a contented life. The Cratchits were facing severe financial problems in spite of that, they used to love each other and were the happiest people. This is because they used to give importance to relations in their life. Even Scrooge corrects his relation with Bob Cratchit, he raises his salary and also bought coal to keep his office warm so that Bob can work comfortably. He even became second father to Tiny Tim and takes all the responsibilities of his treatment. Through this Dickens was trying to give a message that human relationships are more important in one's life than anything else is.

Importance of christmas

Christmas is celebrated to observe the birth of Jesus Christ, who sacrificed his life for the sake humanity and spread the message of love, compassion and sacrifice. But, unfortunately people of Victorian age have forgotten these values and celebration of Christmas was reduced only for doing parties, sending greeting cards and enjoying within their own class. The

upper class of Victorian age were least bothered towards the downtrodden and never ever thought of doing charity and sharing the joy and happiness with them instead they are the reason behind their sufferings. Scrooge represent the upper class of Victorian society wherein he also repeatedly rejects his nephew's invitation to the Christmas celebration calling it as 'Humbug' in a disrespecting manner one mostly can. He said that Christmas is an occasion for wasting money, people spend more money than they earn. Instead of taking leave on that day, it's better for them to work and earn money. He even refused to give holiday to his employee Bob Cratchit, but later he gave holiday on half payment. Later, when the ghost of Christmas present came and took Scrooge in the streets of London he saw how people are celebrating and wishing each other happily. He saw Bob Cratchit's family, who were struggling with financial problems and had a simple feast for the festival day yet they were very happy and were enjoying the Christmas. After this vision, Scrooge changes himself, wishes everyone on the Christmas day, and does charity. He sends a big turkey to Cratchits for Christmas feast and joins Fred's family for Christmas celebration.

'A Christmas Carol' highlighted the lack of human values among the people of that era and tried to convey the message to retrospect and reform. The message conveyed by Dickens not only implies to Victorian age but is applicable to today's world too; people have become materialistic and aren't bothered about the sufferings of their counterpart. Dickens tried to convey that happiness can be celebrated only through sharing and caring and no money can give you happiness if you are all alone. The real essence of Christmas celebration is to share and spread the message of love and sacrifice propagated by Jesus Christ in whatever form one may be.