

SUBJECT : ENGLISH

B. A. (SUBSIDIARY), PART-II,

TOPIC – **A TALE OF TWO CITIES**

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“A TALE OF TWO CITIES” AS HISTORICAL NOVEL

A historical novel deals with historical events. A Tale of Two Cities is a historical novel in the sense that it focuses on the period before and during the French Revolution. In the novel Dickens gives the picture of England and of France during the 1780s.

The novel takes place in England and France in 1775. The age is marked by competing and contradictory attitudes. In England, the public worries over religious prophecies, popular paranormal phenomena in the form of ‘the Cock-lane ghost’, and the messages that a colony of British subjects in America has sent to King George III. France, on the other hand, witnesses

excessive spending and extreme violence, a trend that anticipates the erection of the guillotine. In both counties the poor were exploited by the rich. While there was light and hope for the aristocracy, there was darkness and despair for the insolvent. So, it was the best of time for the rich while the worst of time for the poor.

The Marquis is very cruel. He imposes heavy taxes on the poor villagers who don't have the money to buy food or care for their children because they're sending all of their money to the Marquis. He has no pity for the poor. While returning from Monseigneur's party, his carriage runs over a small child at Saint Antoine. When the father of the child, Gaspard, charges at the carriage, he looks at him with disgust and gives him a gold coin to pay for his dead child. At last he is killed by Gaspard. Dickens sets up the Marquis as a representative of the French aristocracy and a direct cause of the imminent revolution.

The fall of the Bastille is one of the historical events in the novel. The poor were oppressed by the aristocrats. People who raised a voice against the monarchy of France were imprisoned in the Bastille. So, people attacked the Bastille first of all. The storming was led by Monsieur Dafarge and his wife,

Madame Defarge. Being armed with every kind of weapons, the revolutionaries attacked the Bastille on 14 July, 1789. The crowd seized the governor of the Bastille and brought him to the Defarges. The governor dropped down dead under the rain of stabs and blows from the crowd. Madame Defarge then put her foot on the neck of the governor and cut off his head with her knife. They released seven prisoners and beheaded seven guards and hoisted their heads onto pikes.

The ghastly aspect of the bloody revolution is hinted at by the hanging of the old Foulon and his son-in-law by the angry mob. Another aspect is found in the burning of the chateau, the home of the Marquis. The violent aspect of the Revolution is further stressed in the frightening description of the sharpening of the weapons by the revolutionaries on the grindstone, the terrible account of the dancing of the Carmagnole, the working of La Guillotine and the sentencing to death of such harmless person as the poor seamstress.

However, Dickens is not a historian. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, he interweaves personal lives with the French Revolution. Through the treatment of the French Revolution, he has tried to

show that violence leads to violence and hatred is the reward of hatred.
