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For Students of SEMESTER -IV

I have already completed *The Way of the World* by William Congreve. I want to give you a clear idea regarding *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens.

Title- The expression "hard times" generally means a period of slump or depression when food is scanty, when wages are low, and when unemployment is widespread. However Dickens has not used this phrase in that sense. According to Dickens, this phrase is a general state of affairs in which the lives of people are inhibited or restricted and in which people are prevented from giving a free and spontaneous outlet to their natural feelings and sentiments. The phrase implies a kind of bondage to routine and calculation which result from mechanisation and industrialism.

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Chapter wise idea regarding 10 Chapters of Book the First of *Hard Times*

BOOK THE FIRST : "SOWING"

CHAPTER I : THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

The scene is a school-room. In addition to a class of children, boys and girls, there are three grown-up and mature persons present, one of these three being the speaker of the words with which the story opens, the second being the schoolmaster who is being addressed in the presence of the class, and the third a governmental official. The speaker is stating the basic principle of his concept of education. He puts all the emphasis that he can upon "facts".

CHAPTER II : MURDERING THE INNOCENT

Thomas Gradgrind is described as a man of realities, a man of facts and calculations, a man whose thinking is based on facts. Thomas Gradgrind has established a school. He has hired a teacher, Mr. McChoakumchild, whom he hopes will instill in the students nothing but cold, hard facts. Visiting the school, Gradgrind tests a pair of students by asking them to define a horse. Sissy Jupe, the daughter of a horse-riding circus entertainer, is unable to answer, but a pale young man called Bitzer gives a cut-and-dried definition that pleases Gradgrind.

CHAPTER III: A LOOPHOLE

While walking back to his home, appropriately named Stone Lodge, Gradgrind catches his two eldest children spying on the circus through a peephole in the fence. Having raised his children according to his philosophy of fact and having permitted them no imaginative entertainment, Gradgrind becomes furious. He drags the young Tom and sixteen-year-old Louisa home. Louisa admits that curiosity drew her to the circus and tries to defend her brother by saying she dragged him there, but all Gradgrind can do is ask angrily what Mr. Bounderby would say.

CHAPTER IV: Mr. BOUNDERBY

This same Mr. Bounderby—a wealthy, boastful industrialist who owns factories and a bank—is at that very moment in the drawing room at Stone Lodge, pontificating to the pallid and lethargic Mrs. Gradgrind about his poverty-stricken childhood. Bounderby never fails to talk at length about this subject. He reminds Mrs. Gradgrind that he was born in a ditch, abandoned by his mother, and raised by a cruel, alcoholic grandmother. At this point, Gradgrind enters and tells Bounderby about his children’s misbehavior. Mrs. Gradgrind scolds the children halfheartedly, admonishing them to “go and be somethingological.” Bounderby theorizes that Sissy Jupe, the circus entertainer’s daughter who attends Gradgrind’s school, may have led the young Gradgrinds astray. Gradgrind agrees, and they set out to inform Sissy’s father that Sissy is no longer welcome at the school. Bounderby demands a kiss from Louisa before they leave.

CHAPTER V: The KEY NOTE

On their way to find Sissy’s father, Gradgrind and Bounderby walk through the dark, smoky streets of Coketown, passing a number of identically shaped buildings made from identical dirty red bricks. Soon they meet Sissy Jupe herself, who is being chased by the bullying Bitzer. Sissy, a dutiful and loving daughter, has been out buying oils for her father’s aches and pains. The two men follow her back to the dwelling place of the circus performers.

CHAPTER VI: SLEARY’S HORSEMANSHIP

Sissy stops at an inn called the Pegasus Arms, where Bounderby and Gradgrind are introduced to the lisping circus master, Mr. Sleary. Sleary informs Gradgrind that, unbeknownst to Sissy, her father has lost his ability as a performer and has abandoned her in shame. Gradgrind decides to take Sissy into his home and raise her according to his philosophy of fact. Sissy agrees to the arrangement, principally because she believes her father will come back for her—an idea that Bounderby and Gradgrind find fanciful and ridiculous. A strange assortment of circus folk gathers to wish Sissy well in her new home. She is sorry to leave them, because these entertainers have been like a family to Sissy during her childhood.

CHAPTER VII: Mrs. SPARSIT

The next day, Bounderby discusses Louisa with his housekeeper, Mrs. Sparsit, who is connected to the prominent aristocratic Powler family. After falling on hard times, the aristocratic Mrs. Sparsit has accepted employment with Mr. Bounderby, but she constantly reminds him of her family connections. Bounderby worries that the fanciful Sissy will be a bad influence on Louisa, whom he already regards as his future wife. Gradgrind informs Sissy that she may continue to attend his school and that she will care for Mrs. Gradgrind in her free time.

CHAPTER VIII : NEVER WONDER

Later that same day, Louisa talks with her brother about her father’s plan to apprentice Tom

at Mr. Bounderby's bank. Both Louisa and Tom are depressed by the colorless monotony of life at Stone Lodge, but Louisa, attempting to cheer up Tom, reminds him of her affection for him. She seems to feel that something is missing from her life, but when she wonders what it might be, Mrs. Gradgrind warns Louisa never to wonder—wondering contradicts the philosophy of fact, and it also makes Mrs. Gradgrind wish she had never been cursed with a family.

CHAPTER IX : SOWING (SISSY'S PROGRESS)

Sissy complains to Louisa about how poorly she is doing in school and about her mistakes when Mr. M'Choakumchild asks her questions. When he asks Sissy how a number can indicate whether a country is prosperous, Sissy says she can't say if she doesn't know who has the money and if any of it is hers. When he asks her to comment on a rate of 25 people out of a million dying of starvation, she says it must be very hard on the people who starve "whether the others are a million or a million million." When asked to calculate a percentage of people killed in sea voyages, Sissy says the percentage is nothing to the friends and family of the people who are killed.

Louisa agrees these answers are factually incorrect, but she is sympathetic. She asks Sissy about her father and the circus, assuring Sissy that she won't tell anyone. Sissy is still afraid to answer but reveals her father was a clown, frustrated when his performances started going wrong. Shortly before he left, he lost his temper and severely beat the dog, Merrylegs. Then she tells of how her father sent her out to buy a bottle of nine oils to soothe his aching joints and how he was gone when she returned. She has kept the bottle of oils because she is convinced he will return. After this conversation Louisa notices when Sissy asks Mr. Gradgrind if he has received any letters about her father, and Louisa secretly shares in Sissy's disappointment when none arrive.

CHAPTER X: STEPHEN BLACKPOOL

Among the industrial workers of Cocktown is a man by the name of Stephen Blackpool. This man is forty years age. Stephen has a friend by the name of Rachel, a woman only a few years younger than he, being about thirty five years old. Rachel is an industrial worker. One wet evening, Stephen looks for Rachel and waits for her till she joins him. When Stephen enters his room, he is shocked to find a woman in his bed. This woman is Stephen's wife who comes to him sometimes when she is drunk.

Chapter 11 : Sowing (No Way Out)

Stephen Blackpool goes to see Mr. Bounderby for advice about his marriage. Mr. Bounderby greets Stephen warmly, saying Stephen has never been a troublesome worker, never indicated a desire to "be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon," unlike many of his colleagues in the factory. But Mr. Bounderby quickly sours on Stephen as Stephen makes the purpose of his visit known. Stephen knows of wealthy men who have been able to end their marriages when they become a misery. Stephen explains his situation. His wife is a constant drunk who leaves him for long stretches, disgraces herself, and then returns. For the last five years he has given her money to keep her away, but now she is back. He wants to know how to rid himself of her for good.

Appalled by the suggestion that Stephen might end his marriage, Mr. Bounderby informs him, "You took her for better or for worse." After Stephen presses the matter, Mr. Bounderby tells him he would have to spend at least 1,500 pounds to take his case to court and dissolve the marriage. Such funds are infinitely out of Stephen's reach, and Stephen calls the situation "a muddle," a response that angers Mr. Bounderby. He scolds Stephen for questioning the country's laws and institutions and tells him he does seem the type of worker who wants "turtle soup, and venison, and gold spoon." After he repeats that Stephen took his wife for better or worse, he adds, "She might have turned out better." Stephen only shakes his head, sighs, and bids Mr. Bounderby a good day.

Chapter 12: The Old Woman

After coming out of Bounderby's house, Stephen is walking sorrowfully away when he feels a touch upon his arm. It is the hand of an old woman. This woman asks Stephen if he has met the owner of the house from where he has just emerged. Stephen replies that Mr. Bounderby is perfectly well. On learning that Stephen had worked in the Bounderby's factory for a dozen years or so, the old woman catches hold of Stephen's hand and kisses it.

Chapter 15 : Sowing (Father and Daughter)

When Mr. Gradgrind and Louisa speak together after breakfast, he tells her Mr. Bounderby wants to marry her. He explains that the age difference between them is not such a problem for people as practical as they are and explains the case in favor of the marriage. He is taken aback when Louisa asks if she is expected to love Mr. Bounderby, thinking she is above such sentimentality. He tells Louisa to make a decision based on the logic and facts of the situation and an assessment of the possible outcomes of accepting or rejecting the offer. Louisa considers the course of her life and decides to accept his proposal.