

Vision of Society in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

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ABSTRACT

Vice and folly are the twin targets of satire. As a satirist, Orwell highlights all the unsavoury features and sore-spots of the society. He picks up the dangerous portents of contemporary reality and exaggerates them for the sake of urgent attention and effect. Cruelty, fraud and deception are bad enough. But the totalitarian umbrella that shelters these vices and gives legitimacy of truth to lies is worse still. So, as a humanist, Orwell views with concern the totalitarian trends in modern society.

Orwell firmly believes that if totalitarianism is allowed to grow unchecked, it would swallow the freedom and dignity of the individual. After experimenting with different set-ups e.g. imperialism, capitalism etc, he realizes that socialism is the only remedy for the intolerable conditions he has described in his books.

*So, whether it is *Burmese Days*, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *Animal Farm* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell's works expose clearly the evils of exploitation,*

*authoritarianism and totalitarianism. That is why, there is continuous fight in his works against oppression, tyranny, injustice and inequality. In *Animal Farm* there is a bitter disillusion with political revolution which involves savage suppression of individual liberty. His *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is, in some ways, an extended metaphor of *Animal Farm* which witnesses a gradual suppression of the individual's personality.*

*Orwell is a great champion of the underdogs. His purpose, in the novel always remains to associate himself with the oppressed half of humanity. His task has been to plead for the amelioration of the poor working class. But he is hard-headed enough not to be taken in by any utopias. He tells us in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "if there is any hope it lies in the Proles".¹ As an agent of British imperialism Orwell had experienced, for some years, the tyranny and cruelty of an oppressive system in Burma, the reaction of which is plainly to be seen in his book *The Road to Wigan Pier*.*

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL DYNAMICS IN ANIMAL FARM:

Orwell's *Animal Farm*, like many other works, is a powerful attempt on the part of Orwell to belong, psychologically, to a society of poor working class people. And it is true up to a great extent that his humble characters like Boxer, Clover and the sheep deserve more sympathy from the readers than Napoleon, Snoball and Squealer do.

The same is one of the main issues of Orwell's *Animal Farm* with which he deals. In the Preface to the Ukrainian Edition Orwell himself admitted that it would be wrong to think that the book ends on a note of 'reconciliation' between the exploiter and the exploited. He never tries to find a solution that would involve a compromise between the two classes because this would amount to a betrayal of the exploited classes. But the main problem for a writer whose sympathy for the poor is rooted in a sense of guilt is that it does not generate sufficient confidence is easily shaken and they fall into pessimism. Another difficulty with Orwell is his incorrigible individualism on account of which he sees a grave threat to personal liberty in any organized struggle. It is this compound of sympathy for the exploited and a sense of organization that determines the theme of the novel *Animal Farm*.

Animal Farm is a brilliant work, which was completed in a few months. For this novel, Orwell chooses a very ancient genre, based on the animal story found in folk-tales of all primitive novel (when the pigs sit down to drink with the farmers) is meant to represent the Tehran conference, when Stalin met the Allied leaders. But at the same time, it is also a forecast of Russian politics.

He clearly states that he has included the details of Soviet revolution in his book only to give a 'symetry' to his fable. In that sense, he suggests, the human beings are capitalists; the pigs are the Bolsheviks; the animals are exploited classes; Napoleon is Stalin; the imperious Major is Marx-Lenin; Boxer is proletariat and Snoball is Trotsky. Napoleon expels Snoball from the *Animal Farm* just as Trotsky was expelled by Stalin from Russia. By drawing such comparisons and parallels of characters and factual details of the Russian Revolution Orwell wants to expose the Soviet myth in a manner that could be readily understood. The satiric account of the Soviet experiment given in *Animal Farm* may or may not be veracious in each and every minute detail, but presents a picture which is essentially true in its broad pattern and which highlights the major distortion in the Soviet experiment that had gradually shown itself during the Stalinist regime. The revolution of 1917 behind which was

the noble voice of Karl Marx degenerated gradually into the authoritarianism of Stalin. And by implication Orwell wants to convey to the readers the idea that every revolution which begins primarily with noble aims results later into tyranny, cruelty and authoritarianism of one party or one person. It is along these lines that the theme of *Animal Farm* is evolved. And the strength and weaknesses of the novel should be seen as related to this social vision of Orwell. His concern for the poor working-classes and his love of individual liberty compels him to highlight some basic features of the contemporary society and to leave out the rest. That is why he can write a story which has the neatness and simplicity of an allegorical

In the present novel, Orwell presents class-less society. Mr. Jones, in the novel is the owner of Manor Farm, but he is driven out by the animals who take possession of the farm. The mind behind this revolution is old Major, the Middle White boar. Major's ideas are based on Marxian analysis and assumptions. The animals work devotedly for the realization of their dreams. Boxer and Clover represent the masses and they lack the ability to think for themselves but "having once accepted the pigs as their teachers, they absorbed everything they were told..."²

DILEMMA OF POVERTY

Orwell has indicated the dilemma of the poor working class in the voice of Benjamin who says, "windmill or no windmill, life will go on as it has always gone on—that is badly". In this statement lies the real theme of Orwell's *Animal Farm*. In this way, the story of *Animal Farm* does not remain simply that of a particular power structure coming into prominence, but a story of prolonged agonies of the oppressed human beings whose state of depression has become symbolic for all ages. Such people are not victims of fate and chance like Thomas Hardy's characters, but they are victims of the persons of their own class. They have devils and demons in their own class who torture and crush them when they have attained power. The scene of Boxer's death who is the only faithful and hard working animal on the Farm is an illustration of this inevitable betrayal of the poor by the leaders who has befooled them.

The new rulers fail to keep their words and the animals are unconcerned about the future, Orwell's disbelief in life after death does not lead him to an approval of a narrow, self-centred concentration on the present as Jasbir Jain says: "Time even in its temporal context has some meaning. Life continues for humanity though it comes to an end for a particular individual".³

Though this gloomy vision carries a lot of resonance and may, to some people, look axiomatic,

it is ultimately very partial and narrow. And this partiality and narrowness is behind the thinness of characterization in this fable. Too much is left out from human experience to make it very credible or impressive. Boxer has grown old and his muscles had failed to support him in life any longer. Since he is unable to work for the prosperity of the Farm, Napoleon sends him half-dead to the knackers and butchers from whom he got the price of Boxer's blood and skin. Napoleon would not allow the burial of Boxer's dead body on his native soil. Boxer who is wounded in the Battle of cowshed and who is largely responsible for all prosperity and progress of the farm dies friendless without being offered any funeral ceremony with national honour which he deserves. This is the height of exploitation one comes across in *Animal Farm*. Similarly, many smaller animals who have certain complaints in their minds are killed mercilessly. There is complete dictatorship and no animal could raise its head against the ruler.

The life of such animals, Orwell seems to suggest, is full of struggles and hardships like the life of the poor workers in the world and their fate is always to experience betrayal. This kind of social vision is not that of a genuine Marxist but of a radical liberal who can at the most become a utopian socialist.

SEAMY SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE

Orwell believes, though cynically enough, that human nature is basically greedy, selfish and vicious. He finds that 'there is always a new tyrant waiting to take over from the old-generally not quite so bad, but still a tyrant'. He thinks that either of the two positions are tenable: the moralistic, and the revolutionary. The revolutionary supposes that you can improve human nature by changing the system, while Dickens, the moralist, believes that the world will change only when men have a change of heart. Orwell's technique is to demonstrate fully the weakness of Dickens's moralistic attitude so that, paradoxically, he can emphasize the value of Dickens's idea of decency, a moral concept that Orwell adopts in his own work.

In his *Animal Farm* Orwell emphasizes the idea of decency by assigning the role of Marxism to old Major. Old Major pleads for a reign of democratic socialism based on common decency and general brotherhood. In the opening pages of the book his speech is an accurate exposition of orthodox Marxism. On the basis of the inspiration drawn from his speech the animals organise, hold meetings, take important decisions and ultimately succeed in removing the human dictator, Mr. Jones. Of course, the choice of the animal fable does

indicate a gross simplification of the complex issues involved in the revolutionary process, but the positive merit of such a choice is that it highlights some central and essential factors which has an obsessive hold on the mind of George Orwell.

After the death of Major when Napoleon takes over the charge of *Animal Farm* the ideas of socialism are gradually forgotten or perverted. Napoleon drives Snoball off the farm with the help of his vicious hounds; Boxer is sold to the knackers and seven commandments of Animalism are perverted or eliminated, until all that is left is :

**"All Animals are Equal
But some animals are more equal
than others".⁴**

After that, it does not seem strange when the pigs live in Jones's house, walk on two legs, carry whips, wear human clothes, take out subscriptions to John Bull, Tit-Bits and the Daily Mirror, and invite their human neighbours over for a friendly game of cards. The game ends in a violent argument when Napoleon and Pilkington play an ace of spades simultaneously, but for the animals there is no real quarrel. "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which". Orwell has come to believe that his hold of the animal instincts on man which cannot be weakened by any external

revolution nullifies all the gain of social transformation. Whatever force or intensity the story of *Animal Farm* has derived from this basic insight into the nature of man, it is a classic indeed in this context.

Under the process of this ascendancy of the animal in man Orwell has beautifully presented a spectacle of Marxism turning into Stalinism. This is the basic insight Orwell wants to offer. He exposes the terrors of a totalitarian state controlled by a ruthless band of schemers who first exploit the sentiments of the common masses to capture power and then subject them to even a greater desposition than they had been used to earlier. There is a complete realization of Lord Acton's thesis, "power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely."

According to some critics like Matthew Hoggart who in his essay "*From Animal Farm to Nineteen Eighty-Four*" says that the novel "also belongs to the genre of allegory, since it has a point-to-point correspondence with the events of Russian history from 1917 to 1943: the war of intervention, the New Economic Plan, the First Five – Year Plan, the expulsion of Trotsky and the seizing of power by Stalin, the Stakhanovisms, the Hitler – Stalin, the Pact and invasion by Germany are all clearly figured".⁵ However, B.T. Oxley does not consider the novel as an allegory. According to him it is "not an allegory in which everything

has a stand for something else. To read it in this way reduces I to the level of the sophisticated cross word puzzle".⁶

Orwell takes into account psychological factors that operate at different stages in the revolutionary process. According to him, the lust for power derails revolution: when he says that throughout history, one revolution after another... has simply led to a change of masters, because no serious effort has been made to eliminate the power instinct.

The initial purpose of a revolution may have been an ideal of the good life, but the result is always the same-tyranny. Communism is no more or less evil than Fascism or capitalism – they are all illusions which are inevitably used by the pigs as a mean of satisfying their greed and their lust for power. Religion, too, is a tool of the oppressors. Moses, the tame raven who is always croaking about the eternal life in Sugar candy Mountain, flies after the deposed farmer Jones, and returns only when Napoleon has established his tyranny. The hypocrisy and selfishness of the pigs when they ultimately decide that milk and apples are essential to their well-being is explicit in squealer's explanation.

Through such descriptions as quoted above Orwell seems to expose the vices and vanities of authoritarianism. His

attitude of sympathy towards the proletariat or the poor working-class is obvious in the novel. His animal fable bears a familiar and intimate tone. The scene of Boxer's death and the scene of the pile of corpses at Napoleon's feet are described with such vividness and picturesqueness that every reader senses Orwell's intense sympathy with the sufferers. Critics like G. Rai observe that "there is a real pathos in the fate of Boxer, the work horse. His sorrow is evident through old Benjamin, the cynical donkey who says that hunger, hardship and disappointment were the unalterable laws of life."⁷ In that dying sound, Orwell seems to suggest, is the dying hope of humanity.

Usually the animals in his book long for order and quiet in the universe, but they are always unable to get it. They are cut-off from the community of their fellow men. Like their author, they always seem to say that their revolt against society is compulsive, and that it is the miserable and chaotic state of the world that drives them to rebellion. But they also simultaneously feel apprehensive of losing their individual liberty in any mass action. Apart from an awareness of the terrifying persistence of the animal in man despite all revolutions, the other basic insight Orwell wants to convey through this novel is the threat to individual liberty that modern totalitarian systems have rendered. Orwell has a strong hatred for

imperialism, totalitarianism, authoritarianism and Fascism. And it is his rebellion against these evil forces of society which, in the words of Raymond Williams, brought him the name not only of 'democratic socialism' but also of revolutionary and militant socialist. The total strength of his social vision lies in the fact that he envisages a healthier society based on triple foundations – liberty, justice and common decency. He believes that Socialism – freed from the control of the crackpots and dedicated to the cause of justice, liberty and the plight of the unemployed – can serve a logical solution to the horrors of, 'a world in which nobody is free, in which hardly anybody is secure, in which it is almost impossible to be honest and to remain alive'.⁸

ORWELL'S HUMANISM

Admiring Orwell's humanitarianism Jeffery Meyers rightly remarks, "Orwell's moving theme is a fervent plea for human dignity and compassion."⁹ In his other book Orwell celebrates the dignity of the proletariat by expressing his humility in the following words : "If there is one type of man to whom I feel myself inferior, it is a coal miner".¹⁰

In the same book he defines brilliantly the meaning of socialism by explaining that : Everyone who knows the meaning of poverty, everyone who has a genuine

hatred of tyranny and war, is on the socialist side, potentially..... we have got to fight for justice and liberty, and socialism does mean justice and liberty when the nonsense is stripped off it.¹¹

In this context, Richard Rees says that "at his best he (Orwell) was much more realistic, and indeed a better Marxist than the theoretical pundits of socialism and communism".¹² So, it is obviously true that Orwell is a believer in conformity as well as an equalitarian.

Though he measures social life in political terms in *Animal Farm*, his representation of the poor working-class is more or less in the tradition of Charles Dickens. As Dickens identifies himself fully with the poor boy, David, in his *David Copperfield* simultaneously attracting the sympathy of the readers, similarly Orwell invites sympathy of every reader for his noble horse, Boxer. Like Dickens he fights against the evils of exploitation, tyranny and suppression in society. They both plead for the amelioration of the poor. Both are of the notion that ideal society people would not be affected and perverted.

WHY THE SOVIET EMPIRE FELL?

According to Orwell, the biggest reason for the failure of socialist propaganda is that it takes too low a view of human nature of

course, this only shows his philistine incapacity to understand the complexities of Marxist thought. Socialism, for Orwell, is a drive towards brotherly love and honourable equality. He disregards the Socialism of Russia in the Preface of the Ukrainian Edition of *Animal Farm* and states that 'No-thing has contributed so much to the corruption of the original idea of Socialism as the belief that Russia is a Socialist country and that every act of its rulers must be excused, if not imitated..... I have been convinced that the destruction of the soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement'.¹³

Thus, Orwell has a clear idea of Socialism in his mind which he wants to convey through his work. But the negative work of demolishing false myths had also to be undertaken. This is what he has supposedly done in *Animal Farm*. He believes that 'there can be no co-operation between classes whose real interests are opposed. The capitalist cannot co-operate with the proletarian. The cat cannot co-operate with the mouse; and if the cat does suggest co-operation and the mouse is fool enough to agree, in a very little while the mouse will be disappearing down the cat's throat. But it is always possible to co-operate so long as it is upon a basis of common interest'.¹⁴

Like any humanitarian socialist he believes that revolution

by the oppressed lot of society is the only solution to change the system and to establish a region of 'equality, decency and fraternity'. But he wants to forewarn the oppressed about the dangers of being manipulated by the leaders who are going to mobilise them.

Another significant point about his animal fable is that by employing the frivolous form of the animal tale he succeeds in conveying his profoundly bitter message clearly and forcefully. Critics like Christopher Hollis who found author's special love for animals fails to understand that Orwell in *Animal Farm* loves animals as much or as little as he loves human beings. Indeed, the very idea of representing human traits in animals is rather pessimistic. But being a satirist he would never allow the animals to be simply beasts, in that case the piece becomes a non-satirical children's story. Through these animals the writer presents various kinds of societal types – pigs for exploiters, horses for labourers, dogs for police, sheep for blind followers, etc. Orwell seems to suggest that there have been and always will be, pigs in every society, and they will always grab power. Everyone in the society, directly or indirectly, contributes to the pig's tyranny.

LIMITATIONS OF ORWELL'S PHILOSOPHY

But in spite of Orwell's qualifications as a positive critic of contemporary political and social life, he suffers from many severe limitations. The greatest among them is the limitation of pessimism and cynicism. He is a cynic because he takes for granted that human nature is basically greedy, selfish and mean. He appears a pessimist, firstly because he represents human traits in animals, and secondly, because his characters are without psychological, mental and intellectual growth, they are flat and static. For Hatch, *Animal Farm* proposes only the continued subordination of the working classes and suggests that Orwell's sympathies with the oppressed were no more than cosmetic.

Another serious charge which critics like David J. Doomley level against Orwell is his "grossly simplified" and abstracted view of society. Some of his animals representing the proletariat are pictured as mere caricatures. His penetration into the problems of the workers is not as deep and authentic as that of Dickens. This is evident from the gross simplification of human reality inherent in the animal fable.

Another major flaw in Orwell's writing is that of sentimentalism. In depicting Boxer's death-scene in *Animal Farm* his theory assumes sentimental

dimensions. He appears as if he is quite unable to resolve how human suffering can be overcome. Though like Dickens, Orwell attacked social evils and the social inequalities of his age, he fails to make any constructive criticism of contemporary society.

ORWELL'S VISION OF HUMAN SOCIETY

However, despite of so many weaknesses, the device of animal imagery represents a static view of human condition, makes for Orwell's broad outlook of sympathy for the neglected and oppressed sections of society. Symbolically, such animals suffer everywhere in the world where democracy has declined. Allegorically, the fable of *Animal Farm* tends to become a mad race for power. It is a satire not only on the Russian revolution but on all the revolutions of the world. A revolution is, thus, only a change of masters. Revolution or no revolution, common masses will always be exploited, as they always have been exploited. Though critics like Frederick R. Karl believe that *Animal Farm* fails as a successful satire by virtue of its predictability, this terrifying predictability of the fate of all revolutions *Animal Farm* is just the point Orwell is trying to make.

Orwell should rightly be regarded a man of democratic socialism. He is a militant socialist, and not a mere propagandist. His

suggests that man is selfish, greedy and cruel by nature. He is power-hungry and after attaining absolute power he becomes a tyrant. In *Animal Farm* power turns Napoleon's head and makes him mad. Orwell's thesis remains that in every society human beings should be treated with justice and a sense of decency and common brotherhood should mark their relations with each other. He strongly feels that imperialism and authoritarianism should not be allowed to gain ground. He calls for Socialism to be humanised, to be built upon the triple foundations of liberty, justice and common decency. This is Orwell's subject of propaganda, his philosophy of life, his theory of democratic Socialism and the theme also of *Animal Farm*.

Though he presents a simplified, static and abstracted view of society, yet he is a left-wing humanitarian who presents in *Animal Farm* a valuable documentary picture of the lower class life in particular, and humanity in general. Critics like Jeffery Meyers can hardly absolve him of the charge of being a 'radical pessimist', but it would be more appropriate to agree with E.M. Forster that Orwell "tried to ameliorate a world which is bound to be unhappy".¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Orwell being a dreamer and idealist wants to evolve a society which may be conducive to the

welfare of an ordinary man. In his age, capitalism, colonialism and socialism were the chief political ideologies taking over the world. Naturally, he had to choose from amongst them, although he liked socialism, he was against socialists. He was favourably inclined toward socialism. The reason was that capitalism was unacceptable to him because of its being exploitative.

Though he chose socialist system as an alternative, he found the universally acclaimed and accepted Soviet Socialist model unpalatable. He himself failed to devise some variant of democratic socialism because whenever he tried, he found himself in the quagmire of contradiction—between collectivization, industrialization and centralized control on the one hand and democracy and individual liberty on the other. Maybe, it is this ideological confusion that does not let him offer a solution to the problems posed in *Animal Farm*.

His wishes to evolve some socially relevant vision for the society continue till the end. Orwell found every revolution inspired by idealism and communal energy, but the tragedy of every revolution is that these ideals are thwarted in course of time. No political party is honest for more than a few months and these few months represent the prosperity. But the selfish and unscrupulous politicians take over and re-establish the same kind of evil and political system which the revolution had

overthrown. All revolutions are failures, but they are not all the same failure.

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