



Humanitarian perspectives in George Orwell's Fiction

Dinesh Kumar,

Asstt. Prof. of English, Dyal Singh College, Karnal

Dineshkarnal1@gmail.com

Abstract

There is no doubt in denying the fact that George Orwell's fiction is replete with humanitarianism. He peeps in to the poor quarters of those who are the victims of the oppression and tyranny in the society. After a minute analysis, the wretched conditions of the individuals in the hostile circumstances in the society he took the charge of amelioration of the poor masses who are crushed under the weight of totalitarian forces and oppressed systems due to which the personality growth of the individuals is hindered.

George Orwell's novels are an extended metaphor of the humanitarian perspective. He saw his age suffering from bewilderment, anxiety and anguish in the thirties when the Second World War was menacing the existence of man. His novels present a cross-section of the chaotic, muddled and sick world of the pre and post-Second World War. He shows a mystical insight into the cross currents of the contemporary life. As such, his political and human consciousness gave him a much wider perspective he liberated himself from the shackles of ideologies. Hence,

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Orwell is neither a leftish nor a rightist, nor even a middle of the path man. He firmly believes in the human values as the supreme guiding force. Orwell desires to expose the dehumanizing and self-debasing lust for power represented by the state. This brought about a direct confrontation with the totalitarian powers. He could see the danger due to loss of freedom in a communist society as well as in any other state under a dictator or capitalist masters. Nazism and Fascism are only cloaks to hide the degenerating craving for power which is used to make the individuals of the society faceless and slaves.

Orwell's novels show that an individual cannot know the absolute. The individuals are at the centre of the society and are, therefore, the measure of all things. In his world, individual's dignity and viability is note worthy. But, at the same time, he, like Huxley,

believes that dehumanization of individuals is one of the consequences of advancement of science and technology. struggle and to face each and everything in a courageous manner.

Burmese Days (1934), the first of George Orwell's novels, marks a significant beginning of Orwell's evolving vision. Orwell is deeply interested in the structure of society he lives. He gained a first-hand knowledge of how the power structure works. Orwell has a vision of a society that does not dehumanize man but elevates him. He for sees a society in which man has freedom to think, freedom to act. For the creation of such an ideal society, in his first novel, he turns to Imperialism, but towards the end of the novel he feels disappointed with the imperial rule. His attitude becomes anti-imperialist. The novel is rooted in Orwell's personal experiences. Therefore its

content is autobiographical. Orwell himself served as an imperial police officer in Burma from 1922-27. ON the basis of his own personal experiences, Orwell comes to the conclusion that every Anglo-Indian is haunted by a sense of guilt which he usually conceals as best as he can, because there is no freedom to speak. He had to resign from his job because he felt disgusted by Britishers' attitude towards the Burmese. On the whole, the novel strikes one as an individualist protest against alien rule and autocracy.

George Orwell's novel, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, and *A Clergyman's Daughter* expose the poverty-stricken life of the individuals who are deprived of bare necessities of life that makes them dehumanized in a different way. Orwell writes emphatically that endless slums make

negative effect upon the standard of living of the individuals. Both these novels are an authentic and powerful study where he sympathetically probes into the abysmal pits of poverty and its annihilating effects upon the individuals who try hard to cope with the ruthless force of poverty in the society surrounding them. An individual can keep the dignity in his life when he is not living in wants and under constant threat of starvation and death. The individuals are aware of the fact that their survival in the society is not an easy affair, and they have to wage a war against the hard realities of the society.

Orwell's novel, *Coming Up For Air*, is an exploration of an individual's endless search for his identity in a society in which the dehumanizing of commercialism and nightmare threaten the individual the individual integrity. *Coming Up for*



Air is a powerful dramatization of the devastation of the post World War era which disrupted the quintessence of agriculture. He looks at the somber post-World War era and finds that mushrooming of industries and growing intellectual ambition has set the world at the brink of confusion and disaster. Perhaps this perspective has been further extended by Orwell, in continuation with D.H. Lawrence's disgust against the first post-World War era where he feels that man has become a slave of machine. It was the social background that Orwell rails against socialism as he asserts in *The Road to Wigan Pier*." Machine production suggests socialism, but socialism as a world system implies machine-production, because it demands certain things not compatible with a primitive way of life' 1

In such a difficult socio-political scenario, Orwell's only hope lies in

'common decency' and 'democratic socialism'. What Orwell is basically concerned is to have 'a hearing and to bring individuals back to decent, fully humane life.' Orwell's artistic and fictional efforts seem to ameliorate individuals suffering at large and their struggle with the society which is bent upon dehumanizing them. But, he never seems to lose faith in the basic goodness of individual's nature. He cherishes the idea of 'common decency' and 'democratic socialism', and tries to restore the 'religious attitude'. He treats life as 'final'. This humanistic idea enables Orwell to struggle and to face each and everything in a courageous manner.

Orwell's bitter experiences find their proper outlet in his novel *The Road to Wigan Pier* which is fully immersed in his philosophy of socialism. In this way, Orwell's



decisive experiences in Burma determined the course of his future life. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he declares his intention to identify and associate himself with the poor and oppressed, and to remain on their side against their oppressors which makes his attitude essentially humanistic in real sense of words. The novel is one of Orwell's many attempts to root out the class sense within himself. Consequently, we witness a strong sense of sympathy in Orwell's mind for the poor and the oppressed and a feeling of hatred and disgust for the cruel systems of totalitarianism, authoritarianism, imperialism and Fascism which clearly shows his humanistic attitude more and more authentic. He asserts in the same novel: Machine production suggests socialism, but socialism as a world system implies machine-production, because it demands certain things not compatible with a primitive way of

life.” He has highlighted the beast-like living condition of the miners. But Orwell never lost hope in the possibility of rehabilitation and re-awakening of the working class people. He writes: You breathe warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which is not so easy to find elsewhere.”²

In *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell explores beautifully the horror, disaster and banality of the Spanish Civil War in which hundreds of men were slaughtered cattle like. Orwell exposes the fallacy of the communist manifestation which supported the Fascists, in the name of the socialist revolution, killed the republicans and concealed the truth as if it had never happened. The totalitarians declared the republicans ‘a gang of disguised Fascists, in the pay of Franco and Hitler, who were pressing a pseudo-revolutionary



policy as a way of aiding the Fascist cause”³

In *Nineteen Eighty- Four*, Winston Smith is an individual who has developed bitter hatred against totalitarian forces in the society. He shows his rebellious nature against the unfavourable circumstances which curb an individual’s liberty as well as the growth of their personalities. He feels that his individual's voiced has been crushed by the society and he has no freedom to speak truth as he feels himself totally in chains these chains are the chains of the totalitarian and authoritarian type of political systems in the society that keep hindering their personality growth. Like Godron Comstock, Smith rebels against the totalitarian powers. He is no longer ready to sell his conscience and morality in an inhuman world which haunts with

nightmarish experiences. T.V. Screens, Microphones and rubber truncheons such cruel means are enough to expose the individuals who act and even think against the totalitarian power-Big Brother. Winston no longer identifies himself with the existing callousness of the society. The individual’s thoughts, memories and the past are controlled by the theory of Oligarchial Collectivism. Winston, while working in his office, feels the wiping out of the past, the past he reflected had not merely been altered, it had been actually destroyed. Admiring Orwell’s humanitarianism, Jeffery Meyers rightly asserts:”Orwell is a humanist to the core whose moving theme is a fervent plea for human dignity and compassion”⁴

To Big Brother, it is the individual consciousness which can break the party into pieces. Like other individuals, Winston also feels his



individual voice stifled by cruel and inhuman means. There is a perception that one of the aims of totalitarianism is not merely to make sure that individuals will think the right thoughts but actually to make them less conscious. Orwell argues justifiably for the restoration of individual integrity which is wiped out in any kind of totalitarianism. Since, Orwell is a humanitarian writer, he does not tolerate to see the debasing and dehumanizing forces which delink an individual from the past. The society surrounding them provides cheap entertainment and pseudo-propaganda in order to make them unable to think and to make them politically paralyzed.

Like Winston, many other individuals of the society are also vaporized by the totalitarian forces and thus, are deprived of personality growth. Winston's confession before the Party's rules, neither solve any

problems nor it reconciles him to the totalitarian world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It does not bring any solution in the lives of the individuals who, like Winston, are kept deprived of the individual liberty and equality. Winston Smith is the guard of humanity and Orwell says that in the defeat of Winston Smith lies the defeat of humanity.

Like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*, also as an electrifying example to show how the individuals as the society lose their identity when they are crushed by the totalitarian forces. *Animal Farm*, in fact, is a powerful satire against Machiavellian craving for power. He thinks that politics and revolution bring chaos and annihilate individuality of the individuals. Revolution is not an answer because it thwarts man's aspirations and hope for liberty and humanity. Orwell argues eloquently that the revolution brought



in the name of social welfare is merely a cloak to grab unbridled power. It is a presentation to exploit the individuals in every possible way. The individuals after the socialistic revolution find that the degree of exploration and suffering increased in their lives. In the socialistic revolution was brought in the name of human welfare, but after the attainment of power the things turned upside down, and the individual are exploited in more ruthless inner than they had been earlier. This

But as the pigs attain dictatorship, all the seven commandments are altered, and diluted by the pigs in orders to feed their mach Machiavellian and materialistic appetite, Finally, there remains a single commandment, "All animal are equal but some animals are more equal than others. After the failure of revolution, the degree of suffering and pathos is enhanced. It

also enhances Orwell's condemnation of powers which exploit the individuals for the sake of power. The novelist's anxiety is caused by the loss of individuality. He is afraid that the autonomous individual is casing to exist. He expresses a deep sense of anger and disgust against the intellectuals who seek to escape through train orthodoxies. Jay Greenbelt Stephen convincingly exposes the materialistic appetite of all who bring revolution in the name of individual's emancipation, 'There have been are and always will be pigs in every society.'⁵

In this way, Orwell's dynamics of humanism extends a profound and live healthy essence for the suffering individuals who fight endlessly against the society. He wants to employ a sense of conscience and morality in order to prevent the individuals from being further decreed to employ a sense individuals

from being, further, deprived of their essence. He was craving for certain positive

Orwell, like Shelley, was a rebel. The cruelties and inadequacies of the individuals fighting for liberty troubled him. He too quivered like the poet with the frenzied desire to bring fire to mankind and no sacrifice was great in this promethean task, Orwell, being a product of the post industrial era, is fully aware of the lurking dangers and antagonism to this task of commitment to bring succor to the ailing individuals in the society. His humanistic approach to life with all its problems is a brave endeavour on the part of the writer. His aim was to present the individuals in their proper perspective. Only a humanistic approach to life and its problems can provide dignity to the individuals in the society.

References

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