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# Humanitarian Perspectives in George Orwell's 1984 and Animal Farm

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## Abstract

*It is an established fact that George Orwell is a humanitarian novelist who is primarily interested in the society that is based on equality, decency and brotherhood. His novels show humanistic concern for the oppressed half of the society, and always speaks for the downtrodden and repressed people. He favours equality in all spheres of the individuals whom he considers to be an integral part of the structure of the society that has moulded them. Orwell firmly believes that all the individuals in the society contribute to the development and progress of the society.*

## Paper

George Orwell is well known for his staunch humanism. His humanism makes him a novelist with a mission and purpose, his mission being to write for the betterment of oppressed humanity. His humanism results from his consciousness of an urgent need to help to raise the suppressed members of society. He is a crusader in the cause of humanity. He writes for refining and ennobling him for stirring up the dormant stores of tenderness in him for his fellow human beings. On the contrary, he has always written to emphasize the essential dignity of man despite his weaknesses and to engender compassion in the hearts of men

for the oppressed and the downtrodden. Paul Oskar Kristeller says in this connection, "The proletariat movement, which began with Christ and socialist movement of the early nineteenth century but found its culmination in the writings of Karl Marx and George Orwell"<sup>1</sup> His life and writings are dedicated to the values of democracy, freedom, equality and liberal humanism.

His concept of an ideal society rests on the basic tenets of humanity. These are easily understandable by those who have been bred in the best traditions of the nineteenth century liberalism. In fact, Orwell depicts the society in all its sociological hues. He is of the view that humanity can be retrieved only if the society is based on the tenets of socialism. He gives us a faithful representation of almost all the social aspects prevailing during his time such as Capitalism, Colonialism and Socialism, the chief political ideologies taking over the world. In his works, he tries to develop a comprehensive and suitable theory of moulding the society on the main foundations of brotherhood, decency and human freedom. As a journalist also, his effort has always been to bring about a general social awakening among the people. He always shows a deep involvement in the problems of the poorer sections of society. He wants to oppose the system which keeps



them under oppression. But, despite his passionate concern for the poor people, he could not convince himself that any proper method could be devised to end their miseries. He feels apprehensive that only totalitarian structures emerge in modern times to replace the hated capitalist system, though he tries to indict the oppressive system in his books. His experience of the Russian Revolution shatters his hopes for a better future for mankind in which there is humanity and individual liberty. He loves individual liberty and when it is threatened, he fills with gloom and pessimism. He feels that the overthrow of the new type of oppressive system is very difficult. In such a society, there will be no justice, equality and human freedom. One should be conscious that there is danger to one's freedom and this consciousness is the central part of Orwell's socialistic philosophy. According to him, three foundations of socialism are liberty, equality and justice along with human freedom. The virtues of socialism, according to him, are to be measured in terms of decency, common sense and human freedom. His main task in his works remains to propagate a vision of society which is based on the type of socialism mentioned above. He repeatedly expresses his bitter hatred against those forces which threaten these values. The humanity and human freedom presented in his works are something in common with that which has inspired the great humanitarian novelists of the nineteenth century. It must be clear that he is not merely a utopian philosopher, rather his vision of human freedom rests on a realistic

understanding of the activities of his time. He satirises imperialism, totalitarianism and dictatorship in a forceful manner, as we have seen from the study of *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. He is always clear about the gospel he wants to preach. His major themes have always been human freedom, human dignity and compassion. That is why, his works particularly *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* acquire a universal appeal. These works will keep him alive so long as the basic tenets of humanism are valued in the world. These novels reveal a successful fusion of the political insight into fictional form. Orwell's prime concern in these works is the struggle against Fascism, imperialism, inequality, lack of humanity and human freedom. In this way, George Orwell's humanitarianism can be compared to G.B.Shaw in his novel *The Apple Cart* where Shaw writes: "Keeping our distance is the whole secret of goods manners; and without good manners human society is intolerable and impossible."2

Orwell's novel, *Animal Farm* is a utopian fantasy portraying the development of a state proclaimed as an ideal one but becoming despotic. The novelist succeeds in characterizing the evil impulses of human beings by presenting them as animals in the story. The novel also highlights how the common masses are betrayed in the name of human freedom and human values. It is a pointed attack on Stalinism which satirizes the events of Russian Revolution and rise of Russian Communism. Orwell clearly states that he has included the details of Soviet Revolution in his book only to give a



symmetry to his fable. The satiric account of the Soviet experiment given in this may or may not be veracious in each and every minute detail. But it presents a picture which is essentially true in its broad pattern. It highlights the major distortion in the Soviet experiment during the Stalinist regime. The revolution of 1917 behind which was the noble voice of Karl Marx, degenerated gradually into the authoritarianism of Stalin. Orwell wants to convey the idea that every revolution which begins primarily for equality, humanity and human freedom results later into tyranny, cruelty and authoritarianism of one party or one person. He was primarily interested in the humanity and individual liberty. These factors compelled him to highlight some basic features of the contemporary society and leave out the rest. At the very outset of this novel, he presents a society in which humanity and human freedom are mere a day-dreaming. Mr. Jones, the owner of the animal farm is a cruel tyrant who curbs the freedom of the animals. The animals are deprived of equality and humanity. To quote Johnstone, one of the important critics on Orwell, who asserts: "His hope for the future lay in the continued integrity of the individuals as the fundamental components of the society."<sup>3</sup>

Old Major preaches the animals a lesson of humanity, equality and freedom. As a result, Mr. Jones is driven out by the animals who take possession of the farm. The death of the Old Major is a big blow for the animals, whose ideas were based on Marxian analysis and assumptions. In the voice of Benjamin, he has indicated the

dilemma of the poor working class which is deprived of human freedom. At one place, Benjamin says that windmill or no wind. In this statement lies the real theme of *Animal Farm*. In this way, the story of this novel does not remain simply that of a particular power structure coming into prominence. It is a story of prolonged agonies of those oppressed human beings who are deprived of their human freedom. It has become symbolic for all ages. 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 a pathetic one. It is an illustration of the inevitable betrayal of the poor by the leaders who have befooled them. The new rulers fail to keep their words of maintaining humanity and equality, and the animals are unconcerned about their future. The biggest threat to humanism and freedom is totalitarian mind set. After gaining dictatorship, the pigs forget all the principles of humanity. They never think other animals equal rather they pretend that they are keeping all the seven commandments laid by them. This gloomy vision of humanity carries a lot of resonance. Boxer has grown old and his muscles has failed to support him in life any longer. It is the height of inhumanity that when he is unable to work for the prosperity of the farm, Napoleon sells him half-dead to the knackers. From butchers he gets the price of his blood and skin. He does not allow the burial of his dead body on his native soil. Boxer is wounded in the Battle of Cowshed.



He is largely responsible for all prosperity and progress of the farm. Despite of this, he is treated in an inhuman manner. He dies friendless without being offered any funeral ceremony with national honour which he deserves. This is the height of exploitation and inhumanity that one comes across in *Animal Farm*. At the farm, human freedom is thwarted by the new rulers. Similarly, many smaller animals who have certain complaints in their minds are killed mercilessly. There is complete dictatorship. No animal can raise its head against the ruler. Orwell seems to suggest that the lives of such animals are full of struggles and hardships. They are like those poor workers in the world whose fate is to experience betrayal. Old Major pleads for a reign of democratic socialism based on humanity, human freedom, and general brotherhood. That was only to break the social and moral ethics of totalitarian government. He did so because after the death of his mother and sister, he decided to overthrow the Inner Party group as it was the biggest hindrance in the way of human freedom. Orwell feels that a proletariat has the potential to overthrow the despotic power structure, but this potential usually remains dormant. The novelist wants these 'Proles' to be conscious to overthrow this despotic power-structure as early as possible if they want the human freedom alive in the society. In this connection says Crick Bernard, who finds a note of optimism :” Orwell did not possess Hobb’s philosophical sophistication but his democratic socialism, common sense, common decencysaves him from bitter pessimism.”<sup>4</sup>

George Orwell feels compelled to raise humanistic issues quite emphatically. The height of the inhumanity appears before us when Winston and Julia are caught red-handed during their sexual intercourse.. The Inner Party is shown constantly after power. O'Brien explains clearly the policy of the Party to Winston. The human freedom of an individual is always at stake. No one feels himself or herself free at any cost. The novel serves as a powerful warning to the humanity of impending dangers. In this novel, humanity is being carried away along a path which will take it towards total subjugation or denial of human freedom. Winston is deceived by O'Brien in the name of Brotherhood. He gives a severe punishment to Winston in Room No. 101. As a result of that he breaks down. He agrees to love Big Brother and his state policy in Toto. He accepts Big Brother's dictatorship. After his confession, he likes the state's re-writing history, effects the mutability of past to follow the dictates of Big Brother without demur. Orwell seems to suggest that there is hardly any hope left for humanity and human freedom. Winston can be called as a true spokesman of the novelist himself who is advocate of human freedom in the true sense of word. Winston represents the true spirit of humanity. He is a 'Guard of humanity' who fights against totalitarian forces until his mind is rendered insane through physical torture. Orwell suggests very clearly that Winston is the embodiment of the good impulses in human nature. The Inner Party and Big Brother are the embodiments of evil in human nature.



So, there is a conflict between good and evil, and the evil ultimately conquers. In this defeat of the good, lies the defeat of both humanity and human freedom.

It would be wrong to limit the scope of Orwell's social vision only to England. He has written an epic of humanity which has its relevance for all times to come. He fails miserably to provide any answer to the problems of human misery. Winston is made ultimately to submit himself to the tyranny of Big Brother. That is why, his vision of society in this novel remains gloomy and pessimistic. The reason behind this excessive gloom is partly to be seen in his lack of active involvement with the struggles of the working-classes. He lacks confidence in the power of humanity to overthrow a despotic regime. The reason behind it is that he does not have a first-hand knowledge of the organized strength that the working class is capable of showing. Moreover, he fails because he applies his efforts half-heartedly. Winston Smith is so much horribly tortured that he has to surrender before O'Brien. He also betrays Julia. Winston, thus, lost his integrity, and there is complete extinction of his total personality. Even his final release from the prison along with Julia, and the complete human freedom allowed afterwards, does not mitigate the fear of vaporization from his mind. He is fully aware of the transformation that has taken place in him. The love-affair between Winston and Julia also comes to an end. Both confess that they have betrayed each other. Thus, in this respect, the Party has achieved its purpose, i.e., to bring a check on human freedom.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* expresses an individual's fear of isolation, disintegration and dehumanization. Winston Smith represents the spirit of man in it. But tyrants like O'Brien destroy the elements of refinement, culture, health and human freedom from the life of a man. Ultimately, human being is revealed to be nothing more than a vile bag of filth. What we find in this novel is that Orwell's commitment to humanism and human freedom has been considerably weakened. Winston, ultimately, betrays Julia and himself on the name of human freedom. He is waiting for the cruel hour that will end his miserable life. In his defeat, he starts loving Big Brother. It cannot be denied that this novel serves as a powerful warning against totalitarian powers in the world. It provides a remarkable catalogue of horrors in human society. Orwell's story of Winston Smith's struggle for human freedom becomes a classic because of its intellectual coherence. It presents a society which is just like a concentration camp, a society which is organized to destroy human freedom. Those who can live within such a society without protest and outrage, are already dead as human beings. They offer no threat to totalitarian rule. They are purposely created by the state so that they can be murdered in the most efficient manner. The novel embodies the vision of a man for whom socialism remains the only hope for humanity and human freedom the only major requirement.

There are obviously hints in the book that all revolutions including the one which begins primarily with noble aims like



humanity are bound to turn, sooner or later, into a corrupt monopoly of power by one group or one person. And, the result will be as declared by Benjamin in the story that life will go on as it has always gone on i.e. without humanity. The poor workers will gain nothing out of revolution except the tyranny of horror of essential human conditions, which has been remarkably exhibited in *Animal Farm*. Both the novels, *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* deal with the same theme, although their treatment is different. In both these novels, human freedom and humanity have been threatened by the socio-political conditions of the times. In *Animal Farm*, the common masses are first promised to live a life where human freedom will be a priority. But after the revolution, the humanity itself is betrayed. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, we come across how inhumanity leads to the degeneration of one's personality in the character of Winston Smith. It also shows how one's personality growth is hindered due to the lack of human freedom in one's life. The main theme of the novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is similar to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. It is about the obliteration of humanity by the powerful state, by reducing consciousness and diminishing identities. The vision of humanity and human freedom depicted in both these novels- *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is extremely disturbing because of the two fold horror. Not only the external freedom is infringed, but also the spirit of human beings is stifled.

George Orwell, right from his childhood, was deeply conscious of the

injustice which he suffered in the hands of the society. He found a society in which humanity was completely absent. When he joined Burmese Police, he found that in Burma people were being oppressed. They were not given that human freedom which is required for the personality growth of an individual. Orwell has beautifully presented the picture of a world which is totally bereft of humanity. Here we can witness some serious threatening to the human freedom.

#### REFERENCES:

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4. Crick Bernard, *George Orwell: A Life*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1980, p. 21