

George Orwell's Concept of Totalitarianism and Communism with reference to his Major Novels

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Abstract. George Orwell (Pseudonym of Eric Arthur Blair) was born on June 25, 1903 at Motihari, a town of Bengal in India. He is regarded as an English novelist, essayist and critic, most famous for his two novels *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949) both of which were published towards the end of his life. Orwell his *Animal Farm* was an anti-soviet satire in a pastoral setting. This novel brought Orwell great acclaim, fame and financial rewards. In 1949, Orwell published another masterpiece *Nineteen Eighty Four*. In the novel Orwell gave readers a glimpse into what would happen if the government controlled every detail of a person's life down to their own private thoughts. Both *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four* have been turned into films and have gained tremendous popularity over the years. Orwell opines that socialism is the most effective remedy to modern ill. He was tooth and nail opposed to the totalitarian regime of Stalinist Russia and Fascist regime of Franco in Spain. In fact he was an English socialist who was opposed to the continental Marxist type. He was also a social critic because the purpose of his writing was to present social problems. He realised that money is the urgent need of the common man. The message that has been conveyed by Orwell through *Animal Farm* is that power corrupts those who come to wield it. Moreover, the novelist doesn't present the solution of the problem. He does not point out where the common men are to go for efficient and honest rulers. While doing so he declares that he is not a preacher. But like other novelists he is also an observer.

Keywords : Imperialism; totalitarian dictatorship; communism; utopianism; socialism.

George Orwell (Pseudonym of Eric Arthur Blair) was born on June 25, 1903 at Motihari, a town of Bengal in India. He is regarded as an English novelist, essayist and critic, most famous for his two novels *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), both of which were published towards the end of his life. When Orwell was born England's imperialism was peaking. At the age of fourteen Orwell entered Elton School in England where he faced first, the bitter experience of totalitarian leadership under the watchful eyes of his school master who 'used kicks & caresses to keep the boys in line'. (Orwell 1946 : 19) He opposed totalitarianism. What is 'Totalitarianism' ? Briefly speaking it stands for a society which is ruled by a dictator or a group of dictators. All human liberties and rights are taken away. Fascism, communism and socialism in their worst forms are the examples of totalitarianism. Thus totalitarian state owes no justice to the society. Orwell condemns the society which is guided by the ideas of totalitarianism.

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According to Orwell the Totalitarian-minded scientists and political men are engaged in the systematic destruction of the tranquillity of the past and the socio-ethical values associated with it. Science has changed beyond recognition the profile of human civilization. Orwell was preoccupied with the evils of imperialism and progeny, poverty and social injustice and so in the last stage he examined the evils of Totalitarianism.

His most famous novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four* present the evil of totalitarianism as he found that modern world was moving into an age of totalitarian dictatorship. However, Orwell is not completely pessimistic about the development of society. He was of the view that intellectuals could defend moral values and consciousness of the common people from the invasion of totalitarianism. Therefore, intellectuals should realise their role in this connection. However, the novels of Orwell are the best warning against the dangers and evils of totalitarian society. Atkins has observed,

Orwell is a model as he would have wished to be, for the fight which he fought will be continued for a long time. So long as Totalitarianism exists anywhere, free government is under threat and every free man is in danger. Orwell concentrated his energies on making people more conscious of this danger. (Atkins and Calder 1954 : 43)

Orwell himself has said :

Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written directly or indirectly against Totalitarianism and for democratic socialism as I understand it. It seems to me nonsense in a period like our own to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects. (www.theorwellreader.com)

Orwell's *Animal Farm* was an anti-soviet satire in a pastoral setting. This novel brought Orwell great acclaim, fame and financial rewards. In 1949, Orwell published another masterpiece *Nineteen Eighty Four*. This bleak vision of the world divided into three oppressive nations stirred up controversy among reviewers, who found this fictional future too despairing. In the novel Orwell gave readers a glimpse into what would happen if the government controlled every detail of a person's life down to their own private thoughts. *Nineteen Eighty Four* proved to be another grand success for Orwell but he had little time to enjoy it. By this time he was in the late stage of his battle with tuberculosis. He passed away on January 21, 1950 in London. He left the world too soon but his ideas and opinions remained

immortal through his work. Both *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four* have been turned into films and have gained tremendous popularity over the years.

After graduating from Elton, Orwell decided to work for the British Government in Burma as a member of Imperial Police. There Orwell was exposed to many executions and other developments that resulted under imperial rule. He was highly disappointed in this job due to the lack of freedom. In fact he could not forget the mission of his life to become a successful writer instead of wasting the precious time on making money.

Orwell opines that socialism is the most effective remedy to modern ill. He was tooth and nail opposed to the totalitarian regime of Stalinist Russia and Fascist regime of Franco in Spain. In fact he was an English socialist who was opposed to the continental Marxist type. According to him the so-called socialists of Russia and continental countries had interpreted man as a mere economic entity. Man is much more than that. He is loyal to mankind. Orwell struck simple and positive conception of socialism based on general ideas of brotherhood, fair play and honest dealing and he distrusted the involved metaphysics of Marxist thought.

He did not forget that socialism once aimed at human happiness, nor did he confuse the means, once considered necessary to this end (higher production, more consumer goods, international prestige and power) with the final aim. He did not believe in deliberately destroying a relatively happy society simply because it was not organized in a particular way.

Orwell was a social critic because the purpose of his writing was to present social problems. He realised that money is the urgent need of the common man. Orwell had to face a great deal of poverty and scarcity in his childhood as it was very difficult for his father to support his family. He realised that in his family there was far more consciousness of poverty than in any working class family above the level of the dole. He confessed that his family belonged to a middle class that was not far from the bottom. At his early age he became aware of social differences. At school he was often humiliated by the students and the teachers because of his poverty. In his essay - 'Such such were the Joys' he presented the bitter experience of his school life. He could never forget his teacher who once said to him, "You know you're not going to grow up with money, don't you ? Your people aren't rich, you must learn to be sensible. Don't get above yourself". (Orwell 1947 : 33)

Orwell realised that money is as essential for the common man as the other basic necessities like fresh air, good food and shelter to lead a happy contempt free life. To him the number of the rich is very small while the poor were in great numbers. Therefore, if a common man's problems that were related to money only

NAIYER AZAM

were not seriously taken care of, he might have become the victim of exploitation at the hands of the rich. According to him socialism was the only way by which a common man could develop his life. He believed that all the systems were worthless and full of despair. He is of the opinion that socialism should be separated from utopianism because the people who confused socialism and utopianism attacked socialism. According to him socialism believed in reality while utopianism aimed at imagination. Utopians might have declared that they could make a perfect world but a socialist would never say such thing. He would like to minimize the distance between the rich and the poor. He would prove that this distance caused many sufferings to the poor.

Orwell was an anti - communist. He believed that in 1930 the people of Russia were the best-fed, the most advanced and the happiest in the world. During that period the problems of Russians were much more than those of other people in the world. But in 1941 due to Stalin's foreign policy, Russia's relations with other nations declined. In short Orwell believed that Stalin's policy was more opportunistic and it did not care for the welfare of common people. But later on communism came to stay in Russia and Orwell began to believe that the experiment of communism in Russia could never contribute to the progress of the country because it was the last revolution.

In 1948, after the Second World War the theory of socialism was accepted by many nations. Orwell found that many countries started to act under the influence of socialism. Britain was also one of them. But he realised that society was not free from many social problems. Society which the socialists had imagined was still far away from its goal. He was of the opinion that the political parties that acted as government were not purely socialists. Orwell was of the view that individual development made the general development. He neither desired that the poor should become rich nor he thought that the rich should give up their prosperity. But he expected a harmony between the rich and the poor. He wanted to see a change in the mentality of common man. He laid emphasis on the fact that money is not greater than the virtues of man. He was of the opinion that this fact could make man free from many problems.

George Orwell was deeply interested in political issues of his time. The purpose of his writing was to purify politics with the help of powerful instrument of literature. *Animal Farm* is a pungent satire on totalitarianism and fascism. It presents the follies and foibles of man's political behaviour and institution. Through the convention of writing animal stories, Orwell mocks at human society which prefers Fascism and Totalitarianism to Socialism. *Animal Farm* like the *Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer who deals with humour & wit in order to ridicule the follies and foibles of society is a fine documentary on political decline of 20th century.

Animal Farm is the most remarkable work of George Orwell. Unlike other novels, it earned a great fame for him. In February 1944 he completed this book. But four publishers refused to publish it because it was an attack on Russian policy. In 1945 when the Russian policy was disillusioned, Seeker and Warburg, the famous publishers agreed to publish the manuscript. At that time people realised that the methods which Russians were following in the East, were very ugly. *Animal Farm* disclosed the same note of public mood. Orwell got both name and international fame after its publication. It was translated into many languages of the world. Specially in America its success was greater than in any country of the world.

Nineteen Eighty Four, the novel by George Orwell is a brilliant example of sermon in which the hero of the novel (Winston Smith) revolts against the Totalitarian system under which he works. He is provided with a job of rewriting of history to suit the shifts of party policy. But he seldom agrees to with the policy of Party specially its slogans – 'War is Peace', 'Freedom is Slavery' and 'Ignorance is Strength', usually strike his mind. But he finds himself helpless against the powers of party. Party establishes a telescreen in every room in which the smallest actions of the employees may be observed. Winston Smith, the hero with his beloved plan a conspiracy against the party. It results in the imprisonment of Winston who is tortured a great deal that all his resistance is burnt out of him.

The world depicted in *Nineteen Eighty Four* is not a new world; it is rather the War - time world of 1944 which has been vividly depicted. The author imagines that by 1984 everyone is to become a coward, a spy or a betrayer. He also believes that money and lust for power will dominate the society of 1984. The purpose of the novel is, undoubtedly, very remarkable.

In *Animal Farm* there is the theme of the tyranny of political party which consists of the power of government. It possesses the quality of an allegory. An allegory is a symbolic description of problems of the society. Continuing this pattern, the novelist presents animal story in this novel. This story of animals provides the readers with a great humour and wit. Sometimes it seems to be a story of children. But the surface of the story deals with a satirical light on 20th century socio-political world.

The message that has been conveyed by Orwell through *Animal Farm* is that power corrupts those who come to wield it. In fact the book does not present anti communist thoughts. In writing *Animal Farm* he had the Russian revolution of 1917 in his mind. According to him, the revolution started with high ideals, noble hopes but it soon degenerated into hypocritical tyranny under Stalin's dictatorship.

His aim in writing *Animal Farm* was to attack Stalinism and not Communism in general. One of the difficulties regarding the communists was the

NAIYER AZAM

widespread belief that the soviet union under Stalin was a successful experiment in communism and any criticism of Russia became a criticism of the political ideals of communism. Orwell, the novelist mocks at the vices of a socialist at the expense of Soviet experience. Orwell doesn't opine that only communists are corrupt but he conveys the message that the ideals on which revolutions are made, cease to be effective after the revolution. Napoleon who opposed the ways of Jones through which he governed the farm, becomes another Jones. He adopts the same ways. Moreover, the novelist doesn't present the solution of the problem. He does not point out where the common men are to go for efficient and honest rulers. While doing so he declares that he is not a preacher. But like other novelists he is also an observer.

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