

Vision of Society in George Orwell's Fictional Works

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Abstract – George Orwell is one of the prominent and towering personalities among the twentieth century novelists who strongly plead for the down-trodden and oppressed classes in the society. He presents the reality of the contemporary society by exposing the totalitarian and authoritarian powers that sap the freedom and liberty of individuals. He experimented with various ideologies and set-ups like capitalism and imperialism, but concluded socialism as the only remedy for the intolerable conditions he explored in his fictional and non-fictional works. In his novels, one finds his protagonists fighting against tyranny, injustice, oppression and inequality.

Key-words: Poverty, Imperialism, Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism, Capitalism.

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It goes without saying that literature is the reflection of life. It reflects life directly or indirectly through the writings of different authors. Every author is the product of his or her own age. His or her imagination is shaped by the environment in which he or she lives and writes. George Orwell was an eye witness of two world wars, and both the world wars left an indelible impact on his mind and heart. He was a keen observer of the life of the poor like Cobbett and Dickens, but unlike them, his social and political writings involve not only the accurate depiction of poverty and oppression, but also an attempt to use his experiences to test him and define his values. His writings are important as far as moral and political relevance is concerned.

It is an established fact that right from the beginning, George Orwell felt a deep hatred for the society in which he was brought up. In each and every novel written by Orwell, we come across his personal experiences which make his works autobiographical in mode. That is why, in every book by the author, we find the structure of the society not compatible to the vision of the author. He was so much disgusted and disappointed with the post-war environment that he dreamt of society based on the triple foundations of equality, liberty and fraternity which are the important ingredients of a socialistic state. That is why, critics like Raymond Williams calls Orwell not only a socialist but a 'democratic socialist.'

George Orwell's experiences of his childhood were bitter as well as unpleasant as he faced biasness

and discrimination on the basis of class distinction. The memories of St. Cyprian School in his mind were not only miserable but painful too. This school left a permanent scar on his mind and played a significant role in shaping his ideas in future. The type of atmosphere Orwell found in this school was beyond his imagination. In the present book, through the use of pathos and irony, Orwell delves deep into his experiences as a poor boy at an elite British preparatory school where he was subjected to poor living conditions and physical abuse from teachers as well as from students belonging to elite classes. It developed a feeling of snobbishness in Orwell's mind which forms the basis of his further writings. Like Charles Dickens, Orwell was also on the side of the underdogs, always and everywhere, and his sympathy for the oppressed classes was the result of his unhappy childhood.

In his novel, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Orwell presents a vision of society based on his personal experiences. In the present book, he does not explore the idea that poverty is the way as people expect it to be. The idea that people who have never personally experienced poverty, believe that it must be terrible is strongly dismissed by Orwell. His vision portrayed in the novel is based on class exploitation amidst the luxury and squalor of the grand hotel where the splendid customers sit a few feet away from the disgusting filth of the kitchen workers. One of the chief merits of the book lies in Orwell's presentation of psychology of poverty as he witnessed in hotels, hospitals, pawnshops and parks of the mean and degenerated Paris. This book gains autobiographical tone when he delineates tramps in

the novel which reflects his own experiences when he worked as a tramp. Orwell's own experiences among the poor and outcast in Paris and London made him aware of the need for radical changes taking into account not only equitable distribution of wealth, but also a sincere concern for the welfare of impoverished people.

George Orwell's in his first novel, *Burmese Days*, Orwell explores the vision of a society in which the totalitarian forces in the form of fascism, communism and capitalism are prevalent. Imperialism, being the central theme of the novel, acts in a brutal way which is responsible for the degeneration of individuals like Flory who represents Orwell himself in the novel. As Orwell was a part and parcel of this system, he was forced to kick the natives in a brutal way due to which he feels guilty. He managed to relieve this intense guilt in two ways. He resigned from his job, and to expiate his political sin submerged himself among the oppressed poor of Paris and London and took their side against the tyrants by becoming one of them. Orwell's vision of society presented in the novel is concerned with the reconciliation that Flory wants to bring about between the natives of Burma and the British people who reminds us of E.M. Forster novel, *A Passage to India*, but at every step he is a failure.

In *Coming Up for Air*, Orwell presents the vision of a poverty-stricken society where through the character of George Bowling whose vitality is sapped by poverty he suffers from. The present book delineates an apocalyptic vision that destroys a nostalgic dream. Orwell portrays Bowling caught in a brief intense moment between the destructive future and the nostalgic past, and he seeks to escape, like Winston Smith, the painful harsh realities by recapturing his idealized childhood memories. This conflict between the past and present reflects Orwell's desire to establish continuity between the England of past and that of present.

Animal Farm presents the vision of a utopian society which gradually changes into a dystopian vision. With the encouragement and motivation speech of Old Major, whose ideas are based on Marx's ideology of equality in the society, the animals overthrow the despotic regime of Mr. Jones, the farm owner. After that, they expect a life of happiness and prosperity. But, the pigs, by using their power suppress individuals' liberty, through propagandas and fear. This novel presents the dangers of consolidating power in a communist state. It is also a warning against the totalitarianism and authoritarianism which put a check on an individual's freedom and liberty. After Mr. Jones' authority, Napoleon develops into a cruel and tyrannical ruler, who constantly oppresses the animals by one means or the other. It is a powerful allegorical expression of the problems and hardships that resulted from Russian Revolution, and its subsequent oppressive communist state. *Animal Farm* conveys a powerful statement how power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

One of the important statements of the novel uttered by Benjamin, a donkey, "windmill or Windmill or no windmill, life would go on as it had always gone on—that is, badly" illustrates powerfully the crux of the book. In the same way, the statement "revolution or no revolution, life would go on as it had always gone on—that, badly, is also applicable on every civilization. All the seven commandments before the revolution are perverted and changed by the new leaders which change a utopian vision into a dystopian vision.

George Orwell's last novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* examines very minutely a vision of socialism gone wrong. It powerfully explores a dystopian vision of the society. Dystopia is one of the main issues concerning society in the present work. In the present novel, the author examines the techniques used by authoritarian government like newspeak, slogans, doublethink, thought police, two minute hate and junior Anti-sex league to show that government has the absolute power in the society. Like other writers of dystopian fiction, Orwell also tends to delineate and strive to warn people about the risk of dictatorial and tyrannical government that threaten them. *Nineteen Eighty-four* investigates the nightmare vision of the future and stands as a warning for the society in which people are treated as slaves who should abide by the rules and regulations of the authoritarian government. So, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* illustrates a dystopian community where everyone lives a nightmare.

In the present novel, the central character, Winston Smith is subjected to surveillance by Big Brother and his party member including O'Brien and Emmanuel Goldstein. He tries to rebel against this authoritarian regime and struggles to take his freedom. In this way, this dystopian book focuses on the dissatisfaction of Winston smith about this type of government as well as his yearning to remove the power of the party and his hope for a new life with Julia without monitoring as the government uses scientific and technological advancement to dominate the society and puts its citizens under control.

So, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* presents the vision of a society which is like a concentration camp. Those who dare to revolt and protest against the party, are supposed to be vapourised and destroyed. Those who offer no threat are already dead as human beings. The life of Winston smith in the novel represents the life of a Jew in Nazi Germany. This novel embodies the vision of a man for whom socialism remains the only hope for humanity, and freedom the major requirement. In this society, the totalitarian dictatorship destroys the individuals physically, and the existence in such a world becomes meaningless, directionless, hopeless and gloomy.

So, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* explores powerfully the nightmare vision of the future to come. It is in the form of a prophecy and warning in which people are

treated as slaves who are at the mercy of authoritarian government. The present novel illustrates the idea that masses in the society are permitted to have only two emotions: hatred for enemies and even for those who rebel against the party, in addition to it love is given only to big brother, the leader of the party.

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