

George Orwell And His Sense Of Frustration

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Abstract

In the beginning of his career George Orwell was a silent rebel. He felt uneasy as he matured as an artist. He started hating public culture, class consciousness and dual standards. He expressed his bitter experiences in his essays, columns, poems and novels. After studying the works of H.G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, P.G. Wodehouse, Swift, G.B. Shaw and W.M. Thackeray he felt interested in various aspects of democratic socialism. In the beginning he chose pamphlet as the medium of expression because he wanted to share his thoughts with intellectuals too. Once he said :

..... the pamphlet ought to be the literary form of an age like our own. We live in a time when political passions run high, channels of free expression are dwindling and organized lying exists on a scale never before known. For plugging the holes in history the pamphlet is the ideal form. (CEJL : II 326)

He was always conscious of his powers as a polemical writer. His novels and non-fictional writings raise voice against corruption. He knew well that the novel had become the most dominant literary medium of his times and hence he had to shift to this. In his novels he writes freely and does not care for authorities like Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini.

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Like Dr. Johnson, Swift and Blake, George Orwell strongly censured human foibles and corruption in political arena. Critics admire his directness and ethical approach. He got success with his moral force and his essays and journals are read with interest even today. Actually he rejected the existing social code and found virtue in a conscious assertion of individual independence. Once he said :

We live in an age in which the autonomous individual is ceasing to exist — or perhaps one ought to say, in which the individual is ceasing to have the illusion of being autonomous. (CEJL : II 161)

Orwell asks people to remain conscious of dignity of self. He observed that this quality of individual self was being murdered by dictators. This dignity of individual self is the subject of his columns and novels and he tries to protect the world from easy compromises. It is true that he became a popular writer after the publication of *Animal Farm*. Many discriminating readers started paying attention to his democratic thoughts. He established himself on the literary scenes of England and at the same time exposed British imperialism with *Burmese Days*. With the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* he could tell the people that there is something wrong with the political structure of Germany, Italy, Russia, England etc. His masterpiece *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published after the fall of atom bomb on Japan in August 1945. It became an embodiment of post-war terror. To Orwell the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked a turning point in world history :

The atomic bomb may complete the process by robbing the exploited classes and peoples of all power to revolt, and at the same time putting the possessors of the bombs on a basis of military equality. Unable to conquer one another, they are like to continue ruling the world between them.... it is likelier to put an end to large scale wars at the cost of prolonging indefinitely a 'peace that is no peace'. (CEJL : IV 25-26)

Orwell felt shocked with the balance of terror. He felt that the atom bombs would reduce mankind to ashes. In a thoughtful mood he established a relationship between imperialist, totalitarian and nuclear powers. Then he criticized the forces which were bent on oppressing humanity. Aldous Huxley described human suffering in *Brave New World*. What is unique about Orwell's treatment of these themes is that these observations were his bitter experiences at various places. He tried to recast the society after his dreams. Orwell painted a very real picture of human condition with the help of wasp and said :

I thought of a rather cruel trick I once played on a wasp. He was sucking jam on my plate, and cut him in half. He paid no attention, merely went on with his meal, while a tiny stream of jam trickled out of his served esophagus. Only when he tried to fly away did he grasp the dreadful thing that had happened to him. It is the same with the modern man. The thing that has been cut away is his soul, and there was a period — twenty years, perhaps $\frac{3}{4}$ during which he did not notice it. (CEJL : II 30)

Like Swift and Mathew Arnold, he makes efforts to create faith of people in the sweetness of life. He feels that modern man may die of spiritual despair if he does nothing to regain his mental strength. For him life is not a tale of suffering. Though life of modern man is full of horrors, it should be modified with strong efforts to make it a source of joy. He believes in the positive values of life. He felt seriously wounded in Spain.

It is true that he is not a traditional Christian. Yet he appreciates certain aspects of religion. He appreciates Christianity though fails to approve the concept of heaven. He hopes to make life worth living with him pen. His *Burmese Days* and *The Road To Wigan Pier* confirm his sympathy for the poor and the oppressed people.

His bitter experiences in Burma proved decisive and determined the course of his future life. In *The Road to Wigan Pier* he declares his intention to protect the interests of the poor and the oppressed people. He exposed the oppressors boldly. *Burmese Days*, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* confirm his sympathy for the proletariat and the downtrodden. Here he described his bitter hatred for imperialism, authoritarianism, capitalism, totalitarianism and Fascism.

Quite often he asked himself — What is the aim of art? Is artist supposed to meet political requirements? Is there unity between artistic purpose and political purpose? After studying the history of French revolution (1789) and American War (1860 – 1864), he felt that revolutions don't always succeed. After studying the history of first world war, he analyzed the cause and effects of this brutal event. After 1930 he thought of economic equality, democratic socialism, parliamentary democracy, classless society and various shades of Socialism. The growth of Hitler's military powers had become clear and there was revival of blind nationalism in many countries. H.G. Wells's *The Sleeper Wakes* was disgusting to him as the workers of the world failed to unite. Orwell remarks :

Everyone who has ever read *The Sleeper Wakes* remembers it. It is a vision of glittering, sinister world in which society has hardened into a caste system and the workers are permanently enslaved. It is also a world without purpose in which the upper castes for whom the workers toil are completely soft, cynical and faithless. There is no consciousness of any object in life, nothing corresponding to the fervour of the revolutionary or the religious martyr.
(CEJL : II 46)

Orwell didn't like Aldous Huxley's picture of society as given in *Brave New World*, He said :

In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, a sort of post-war parody of the Wellsian Utopia, these tendencies are immensely exaggerated. Here the hedonistic principle is pushed to its utmost, the whole world has turned into a Riviera hotel. But though *Brave New World* was a brilliant caricature of the present (the present of 1930), it probably casts no light on the future. No society of that kind would last more than a couple of generations... (CEJL : II 46)

Orwell was shocked to see the many British intellectuals admired Marxism at that time and there was sharp reaction against Capitalism. The scholars accepted theories of classless society, class-war and interpretation of history as given by Marx. But Orwell noticed that the capitalists had become wise with the changing economic conditions and forgot their mutual differences. They understood the demands of the time and as a result the labourers of England had no love for the labourers of the world. Italy faced economic crisis because she got nothing except victory. Germany had badly lost in the first world war and many restrictions were imposed upon her. Orwell found the growth of Nazism and Fascism in Germany and Italy and lamented :

It is just here that Marxian Socialists have usually fallen short. Their interpretation of history has been so mechanistic that they have failed to foresee dangers that were obvious to people who had never heard the name of Marx. It is something urged against Marx that he failed to predict the rise of Fascism. I do not know whether he predicted it or not A year or more after Hitler had risen to power official Marxism was still proclaiming that Hitler was of no importance and Social Fascism (i.e. democracy) was the real enemy. London would probably not have made mistake. His instincts would have warned him that Hitler was dangerous. (CEJL : II 47)

After 1930, Orwell felt disgusted with the growth of economic depression. Authorities failed to solve the problem of unemployment in U.S.A., U.K., Italy, Germany etc. Now Orwell ridiculed the stupidity of 'Socialists Propaganda'.

After 1935, many journalists asked him questions regarding Proletarian literature, interests of working class, future of Marxism, stability of peace etc. He did not hide his leanings towards the Have Nots and said :

What people mean by it (Proletarian Literature), roughly speaking, is a literature which is supposed to be completely different from that of the richer classes, gets a hearing. And that, of course, has got mixed up with Socialist Propaganda. I don't think the people who throw this expression about mean literature written by Proletarians. W.H. Davies was a Proletarian, but he is not a Proletarian. The reason why I am doubtful of the whole conception is that I don't believe the Proletariat can create an independent literature while they are not dominant class. (CEJL : II 54)

Regarding his vision of life he said :

I have always maintained that every artist is a propagandist. I don't mean a political propagandist. If he has any honesty or talent at all he cannot be that. Most political propaganda is a matter of telling lies, not only about the facts but about your own feelings. But every artist is a propagandist in the sense that he is trying, directly or indirectly, to impose a vision of life that seems to him desirable. I think we are broadly agreed about the vision of life that Proletarian literature is trying to impose. As you said just now, the mystique behind it is the class war. That is something real : at any rate, it is something that is believed in. (CEJL : II 57)

Following the pattern of G.B. Shaw, he exposed the evils of capitalism and said :

My point about proletarian literature is that though it has been important and useful so far as it went, it isn't likely to be permanent or to be the beginning of a new age in literature. It is founded on the revolt against capitalism, and capitalism is disappearing. In a Socialist state, a lot of our left-wing writers — people like Edward Upward, Christopher Caudwell, Alec Brown, Arthur Calder-Marshall and all the rest of them who have specialized in attacking the society they live in, would have nothing to attack. Just to revert for a moment to a book I mentioned above, Lionel Brittain's *Hunger And Love*. This was an outstanding book and I think in a way it is representative of proletarian literature. (CEJL : II 57-58)s

Due to the changing economic conditions of the world the workers became conscious of their rights and consequently a new kind of literature emerged. Orwell said :

And behind this book, and lots of others like it, you can see what is really the history of a proletarian writer nowadays. Through some accident — very often it is simply due to having a long period on the dole a young man of the working class gets a chance to educate himself. Then he starts writing books, and naturally he makes use of his early experiences, his suffering under poverty, his revolt against the existing system, and so forth. But he isn't really creating an independent literature. He writes in the bourgeois manner, in the middle-class dialect. He is simply the black sheep of the bourgeois family, using the old methods for slightly different purposes. (CEJL : II 58)

After having analyzed the principles of Marxism, he failed to be a blind Communist. He had his own political vision and Bernard Crick remarks :

So far from not having 'lost all faith in the Labour Party', it is the first sign anywhere in his writings or letters that he had ever had any at all. Thinking more widely about politics during and after Spain, he plainly did not want to sound too sectarian or fanatical. The phrase indicates his agreement with those in the ILP who saw themselves as the temporarily suppressed conscience of the Labour Party, rather than a true Marxist vanguard that would one day head a revolutionary mass movement. (GL 365)

Due to growth of industrialization Britain, France, Germany, Italy etc. were struggling for markets in Asia, Africa and other continents and were guided merely by self-interest. He now accepted that 'imperialism is the last stage of capitalism'. Even Russian authorities thought on the same lines these days. Orwell knew well that these major world powers were not playing any light game.

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