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THE SOCIOLOGY OF GEORGE ORWELL'S A CLERGYMAN'S DAUGHTER

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ABSTRACT:

The novel as a form of literature emerged as an expression of society during the eighteenth century and developed under the capitalistic society in the nineteenth century, but after the World War I, we get the drastic changes in its form and content. The interpretation and analysis of the novel was also changed by the newly developed approaches and theories of literature. In this article an attempt has been made to interpret George Orwell's *A Clergyman's Daughter* in the light of the concept 'sociology of the novel; which studies the sociology of the writer, the social referents in the novel, the modes of production and distribution of the literary works and the role of publishers, distributors, critics, readers and other social factors in the rise and fall of the novel.

KEYWORDS: Clergyman's Daughter, sociology of literature, several social thinkers and critics.

A CLERGYMAN'S DAUGHTER

George Orwell



Dr. Arun Murlidhar
Jadhav

INTRODUCTION:

The sociology of the novel is a variant of the very concept of the sociology of literature. It studies the sociology of the writer, the social referents in the novel, the modes of production and distribution of the literary works and the role of publishers, distributors, critics, readers and other social factors in the rise and fall of the novel. The several social thinkers and critics from Madame de Sale to the present age have focused the social factors and determinants of literature for the interpretation and analysis of literature. However, the precise and comprehensive theory of the sociology of the novel is found in the works of George Luckacs' *Theory of Novel* (1971), Lucian Goldman's *Towards a Sociology of the Novel* (1971) and Alan Swingewood's *The Novel and Revolution* (1975). In his *The Novel and Revolution* (1975) Swingewood says:

Two major interrelated theories dominate the sociological discussion of

the novel. The first attributes its development to the growth of the bourgeoisie and modern capitalism: 'in its moral and psychological focus, in the technology of its production and distribution, in the domestic privacy, leisure and reading habits which it required from its audience, the novel matches precisely the great age of industrial, mercantile bourgeoisie (3).

The second theory suggested by him has a close connection between liberal ideology and the novel form. Like Swingewood, George Luckacs, Lucien Goldman, Ian Watt, Raymond Williams and others have supported the view that the novel form is a cultural product and it is developed and brought to completion by social environment, the rising middle class, the ideology of the writers, gatekeepers of literature and the currents of new principles and ideas.

ORWELL'S CONCEPT OF NOVEL:

George Orwell wrote six novels to express his ideas about socio-political problems of the day. However, his concept of novel is thoroughly different from his contemporary novelists like James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and others. The major issues of his novels are concerned with the contemporary socio-political problems and situations and used these issues to direct the people to certain ideologies. He believed that novel is one of the powerful means of making people aware of the social problems and in all his novels we get the discussion on the serious social problems. In his 'Why I Write' Orwell professed the reason of his writing: "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" (7). In short, the novel acquired a new dimension social reform in his hands. On the whole, the aim of this research article is to discuss and analyse George Orwell's *A Clergyman's Daughter* in the light of the sociology of novel.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF A CLERGYMAN'S DAUGHTER:

A Clergyman's Daughter is an experimental novel in which Orwell has presented his reactions about the contemporary social problems of poverty, unemployment, education, religion and the failure of communication during the early period of his career. In it he makes use of a female protagonist, Dorothy Hare, as his mouthpiece who loses both her identity and religious faith. In the beginning Dorothy is seen taking care of her father devotedly, participating in religious organizations as a guide, collecting funds for the church and helping the needy people. Such a pious girl comes into contact with Mr. Warburton, who tries to seduce her. A village gossip, Mrs. Semprill, observes the very scene of seduction and discloses the secret to village people. After her encounter with Mr. Warburton, Dorothy loses her memory and suffers from amnesia and eventually leaves home. She, then, comes into contact with Nobby, a hop picker, and wanders with him in search of work but in vain. Both Dorothy and Nobby lead the life of hunger, begging, starvation and sleepless nights. They move from one farm to another and finally they get a job of hop picking in the tin roofed huts of hop-pickers. She then lead quite happy life with Nobby, but soon her mate, Nobby, gets arrested by police for theft of apples and Dorothy again suffers greatly. She can not sleep throughout the night and then abruptly her memory comes to her and she remembers everything about her past. She also comes to know her defaming news in *Pippin Weekly* and feels restless.

After recovering her memory Dorothy returns to London where she experiences the grim reality of poverty stricken life. Dorothy experiences such a deadly cold and starvation for nine days and ten nights. The only way to get alive from starvation was to beg but begging is also prevented. However, Dorothy decides to beg and while begging she is arrested. Sir Thomas Hare helps Dorothy to release from prison and to get a job of teacher in Mrs. Creevy's *Ringwood House Academy*. Dorothy gets job but she does not get satisfaction of teaching because Mrs. Creevy is running that school only to get money and not for the development of the students. When she understands the poor learning of the students, she adopts a new and exciting teaching strategy. Due to her attempts of new techniques of teaching, she is dismissed from the school and she again faces the problem of unemployment and starvation, but fortunately Mr. Warburton comes to help her. He tells her that Mrs. Semprill is punished for the spreading the wrong news about her and her father, has agreed to accept her. Finally she returns to Knype Hill with Mr. Warburton. On her way to home Mr. Warburton proposes but she rejects his

proposal of marriage and resumes her duties of religious activities as before.

A Clergyman's Daughter presents the loss of identity and religious faith of Dorothy but Orwell's main interest is not in Dorothy or in her amnesia but in social conditions of the contemporary England, especially the poverty and suffering of hop-pickers in Kent, the wretched conditions of homeless persons and prostitutes in London caused by capitalism and class distinction and the money minded educational system caused by materialism in the contemporary England. The novel also presents the spiritual crisis of modern generation. At the beginning of 1932, Orwell was working as a teacher in a private school at Hayes in West London. While at the school he was involved with local the church and at that time he understood the loss of religious faith in modern community. Orwell throws light on the lack of spirituality and the loss of religious faith through the conversation between Victor and Dorothy. Victor remarks that nowadays people do never visit the church. However, Dorothy replies they do come 'to be married and buried'. She also notes that two hundred people visit the church at Easter communion. To prove the spiritual sterility of the people Victor remarks:

Two hundred! It ought to be two thousand. That is the population of this town. The fact is that three quarters of the people in this place never go near the church in their lives. The church has absolutely lost its hold over them. They don't know that it exists (CD 62).

Like the spiritual sterility, the misreportage of the news media is one of the social problems of the day. Instead of focusing the severe social problems the news Medias concentrate on the breaking news of fake sex scandals. After the encounter of seduction with Mr. Warburton, Dorothy loses her memory and eventually leaves home. This incident is misrepresented repeatedly in the *Pippin's Weekly* and other news media under the headline "Passion Drama in Country Rectory", "Parsons Daughter and Elderly Seducer", "White Haired Father Prostrate with Grief", "Secret love Life of Rector Daughter". Due to this misrepresentation of a scandal, Dorothy's father abandons to search her and when she herself contacts him for help, he neglects her. The novel thus presents the failure of communication and one of the causes of this miscommunication is the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the fact in the newspapers of the day. In this regard Robert Lee describes "this is Orwell's first real treatment of misreportage in the news media" (Lee 25). The novel thus condemns the news media of Orwell's time.

The major social issues that determined the fate of *A Clergyman's Daughter* are the desolate conditions of hop pickers, tramps and unemployed workers and the capitalistic educational system of the day. In August 1931 George Orwell had gone to hop fields in Kent and had remained there for two months. He worked there as a hop pickers and experienced the wretched conditions of hop pickers and his very experience is the determinant of a part of the novel. In *A Clergyman's Daughter* he writes: "as to what you earned by hop picking, it was just enough to keep body and soul together, and no more" (CD 108). In addition to the rate of pay the rule were very hard. No hop pickers were allowed before finishing the picking of hops in the field, otherwise the farmers would reduce the rate of payment and the strikes were practically impossible. Due to the low wages the hop pickers suffered from starvation and had to steal apples from neighbouring orchard. The situation of hop pickers depicted in the novel reveals that "the low price of the hops was the root of the trouble" (CD 109). Orwell's interest in hop-pickers is shown through their cockney dialect and the song which reveals their hardship and suffering. The hard work, exploitation and suffering, of hop pickers clearly show that Orwell's main interest in the novel is not Dorothy but the wretched conditions of the hop-pickers. In short, the sociology of hop pickers is one of the determining factors of the novel.

Like hop pickers, the dramatic scene at Trafalgar Square mirrors 1930's unemployed England. During his tramping in England Orwell observed and experienced the results of the very economic depression. The Trafalgar scene in the novel is an outcome of these observations and experiences. Orwell's depiction of the suffering and starvation of the homeless unemployed workers at Trafalgar Square shows that the contemporary social condition of the workers made him to write this novel. In this regard Sant Singh Balsays, "in the early 1930's, one out of four workers was unemployed in Great Britain, while many who were employed received very low wages, and their jobs were not secure" (102). He further points out "the official figure of the unemployed in Great Britain was quoted at two millions. But according to Orwell, the number of such people at the time was about six millions" (103). Here Orwell's main intention is to condemn the problem of poverty and unemployment.

According to Robert Lee besides this condemnation of unemployment he presents, as its resolution, conservatism and a tolerance of the inequities and inequities of social life that denies the liberal spirit." (Lee 25).

After giving the detailed description of poverty and unemployment, Orwell turns towards the certain aspects of the contemporary educational system. According to Edward Thomas "After his days of tramping, Orwell had gathered varied experience as a private school-master ...He draws on his teaching experience in a comic yet horrifying account of a suburban private school where Dorothy teaches for a while" (Thomas 25). In the novel Mrs. Creevy runs a private school where Dorothy works as a teacher. In fact, the main object of Mrs. Creevy was not providing education to the children but to get the fees. When Dorothy learns about the poor condition education in the school she desires to develop it. However, Mrs. Creevy tells her,

"What you have got to get hold of once and for all is that there is only one thing that matters in a school and that's the fees. As for all this stuff about 'developing children's minds' as you call it, it is neither here nor there. It's the fees I'm after, not developing the children's mind. After all, it's no more than commonsense. It's not to be supposed as anyone'd go to all the trouble of keeping school and having the house turned upside down by a pack of brats, if it wasn't that there's a bit of money to be made out of it. The fees come first, and everything else comes afterwards" (p.255).

The very views of Mrs. Creevy throw light upon the contemporary educational system. Like Mrs. Creevy, the parents are also against the real motto of education. When Dorothy starts teaching the students in a sensible way, the parents warns her "we don't send our children to school to have ideas put into their heads... give them a good bit of figuring and handwriting and bothers the rest. Practical work" (251-52). In this sense Lee states that "a system of education and an attitude toward it are on trial" (p.43). In short money-minded educational system of Orwell's time is the one of the major determinant of *A Clergyman's Daughter*.

ORWELL'S IDEOLOGY:

The ideology of George Orwell depicted in *The Clergyman's Daughter* is the result of his personal experience. Orwell's childhood was passed in England which was familiar with monarchy, empire, public schools and beautiful countryside. He was well familiar with England of upper middle class. However, on his return from Burma he experienced another England of tramps and vagabonds, poverty and unemployment, beggars and prostitutes. Orwell's depiction of poverty, its causes and its effects on human consciousness is not an objective observation but it is his felt experience. When he saw poverty in England his worldview of poverty got a new dimension. He then decided to identify himself with the poor through Dorothy in *A Clergyman's Daughter* While observing the ugly and strange England he states, "I have never seen comparable squalor in the far East" (RWP: 56). This England provided him material for his *The Clergyman's Daughter*.

The debasing effects of poverty and the loss of religious faith have been presented in the novel through the five phases of Dorothy. The first phase presents the decline of religion through the character of Dorothy's father who never cares about his debts or about religion and Dorothy's experience about the loss of religious faith among the people. The second phase begins after the loss of Dorothy's memory with a group of hop-pickers around Kent. This phase presents the wretched conditions of unemployed hop-pickers. The third phase gives the detailed description of homeless poor in Trafalgar Square. This part reviews Orwell's own experiences after his return from Paris. The scene presents Orwell's comment on the realistic picture of the contemporary beggars, tramps and unemployed during 1930's England. Orwell's ideology about education is presented through the forth stage of Dorothy's life. When Dorothy becomes a teacher in Mrs. Creevy's school, at Ringwood House, she understands that the hypocrite nature of the contemporary educational system. On the very first day in the school, Mrs. Creevy tells Dorothy, "we are very strong on the moral side at Ringwood House (CD: 157). But later she brings to notice: "developing the children's mind as you call it, it is neither here, nor there. It's the fees I am after not developing the children's mind (CD: 208). This is Orwell's real criticism of the state of education in his contemporary England, particularly in private school which existed in vast numbers in every London suburb and every provincial town. The final stage of Dorothy's life shows an attempt to regain the religious faith. It also shows the existential nature of the novel. In short Dorothy's wandering experience from a quiet village to London lodgings, from hop-keeping in the countryside to private school teaching, gives us detailed glimpses of Orwell's

worldview or ideology about poverty stricken life of the contemporary unemployed poor and the educational system of the day (Bal:90).

The novel clearly states that Dorothy's amnesia or the loss of religious faith is the loss of Orwell's own identity crisis. After leaving Burma Orwell was wandering in search of a new ethos and he found out a new world full of suffering and poverty. So Jeffery Meyers states, "Before he published his first book at the age of thirty, Orwell's experience ranged from Eton to service in the colonial police, and from short periods as a tramp, dishwasher, hop-picker, tutor and teacher to book reviewer and pseudo-Georgian poet ... Orwell deliberately sought out experience to provide material for his writing, and everything he produced is related to the events of his life" (Jeffery Meyers, 2002:01). Thus it is concluded that in *A Clergyman's Daughter* Orwell sought to demonstrate his world view of new world against the landscape of spiritual trauma.

The Gatekeepers of Literature:

The social position of the writer rests upon the role of gatekeepers comprising publishers, distributors, critics and reviewers of his works. Unlike his other works, *A Clergyman's Daughter* did not face any problem for getting published but at the same time it did not appeal to the gatekeepers nor even to the writer himself. The novel is about the loss of identity and religious faith of Dorothy who wanders from one place to another and encounters the several serious social problems such as poverty, education, unemployment and loss of faith. In fact it is an experimental novel and Orwell seems neither serious about its form nor happy with its content. However, he was badly in need of money, so he decided to publish it. In a letter to George Woodcock on 28 September 1946 he dittoed his comment on *A Clergyman's Daughter* that "it was written simply as an exercise and I oughtn't to have published it, but I was desperate for money". He added that "At that time I simply hadn't a book in me, but I was half starved and had to turn out something to bring in £100" (Orwell, Sonia, 1970:).

Although Orwell himself was not happy with the novel, the critics were kinder to this weakest book published by Gollancz in March 1935. After the publication of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, it was responded both positively and negatively. For instance, Frank Wadsworth described it as Orwell's 'poorest novel' and Peter Quennell calls the novel 'ambitious yet not entirely successful' (Meyers 61). Victor Pritchett emphasizes the negative rather than the nostalgic portrayal of religion, calls the satire 'a whip for vicarages' and praises the 'immense knowledge of low life.' Like Peter Quennell and Michael Sayers, Pritchett compares the Trafalgar Square episode to the Night town scene in *Ulysses* (1922). Though the scene is not really Joycean, his statement that Orwell's Joycean style 'utterly ruins the effect' is still repeated today (Meyers 02). In fact, the generous remarks of the critics and reviewers contributed greatly in the existence of *A Clergyman's Daughter* otherwise the novel would have destroyed or stopped to republish. In the issue of Observer dated 10th march 1935, L.P. Hartley writes:

A Clergyman's Daughter is a realistic novel, to be judged by canons of verisimilitude founded on daily life...Mr. Orwell is not concerned with probability in the wider sense but with exhibiting in the strongest possible light, and with the most vivid illustrations, man's inhumanity to man. The hop pickers are comparatively amiable; the down-and-outs in Trafalgar Square are patient, and sometime humorous, in their misfortune... Its merits lie in the treatment, which is sure and bold, and in the dialogue, which is always appropriate, and often brilliant, although (when Dorothy's humbler friends are speaking) it has to be expressed largely in dashes and exclamation marks (Meyers 58).

Considering Orwell's worldview and criticism of these contemporary reviewers and critics, it is found that though Orwell was not happy with *A Clergyman's Daughter*, it is undoubtedly a good novel. It is really based upon his real experience. In this regard Jeffery Meyers states, "Before he published his first book at the age of thirty, Orwell's experience ranged from Eton to service in the colonial police, and from short periods as a tramp, dishwasher, hop-picker, tutor and teacher to book reviewer and pseudo-Georgian poet ... Orwell deliberately sought out experience to provide material for his writing, and everything he produced is related to the events of his life" (Meyers 01).

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