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GEORGE ORWELL'S ANIMAL FARM AS A CRITIQUE OF TOTALITARIANISM AND COMMUNISM



Research by



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Sr. No	Title And Name Of The Author (S)	Page No
1	Haplotype Frequencies And Linkage Disequilibrium In The DRD2locus In The Tribes Of Tamilnadu A. Krishnaveni and K. Prabhakaran	1
2	George Orwell's Animal Farm As A Critique Of Totalitarianism And Communism Dr. Arun Murlidhar Jadhav	9
3	Economics Of Wild Life Conservation In India A Spatio Temporal Analysis Dr. R. N. Yadav	13
4	Awareness And Use Of CeRA Consortium By Teaching Faculty And Research Scholars In Agriculture Universities In Karnataka : A Study Eakanath Rathod and Lalita K. Sami	18
5	संविधान-विधाता-डॉ. बाबासाहेब अम्बेडकर माधवी राजहंस	23

**GEORGE ORWELL'S ANIMAL FARM AS A CRITIQUE OF TOTALITARIANISM AND COMMUNISM****Dr. Arun Murlidhar Jadhav**Associate Professor & Head, Department of English,
Y. C. College, Islampur, Dist.: Sangli.**ABSTRACT**

The main object of George Orwell's novels written during this early phase of his life was to propagate the social problems of the day. He criticized social evils caused by the imperialism and capitalism in these novels. However, his experience in the Spanish Civil War changed his outlook from capitalism to totalitarianism and this world view made him to write the novel with political purpose. *Animal Farm* is Orwell's most popular and enduring masterpiece in which he tried to fuse the political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole. On a larger scale, the novel is viewed as an allegory for the rise and decline of socialism in the Soviet Union and the emergence of the totalitarian regime of Joseph Stalin. The present research paper is an attempt to interpret of *Animal Farm* on of the theory of the sociology of literature.

**KEY WORDS :** *George Orwell's novels, Animal Farm, sociology of literature.***INTRODUCTION**

Eric Arthur Blair, better known by his pen name George Orwell, was born on 25th June 1903, in India, but he was brought up in the socio-cultural environment of England. His main object of the novels written during the later phase of his career was to propagate the problems of totalitarianism and this world view made him to write the novel with political purpose. His close observation in Spanish Civil War and the active participation in the Second World War made him conscious about communism in Russia under the despotic rule of Stalin and the totalitarianism and Communism of fascist political leaders in Spain, Germany and Russia. In order to make people aware of these threats he wrote *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four*. The present research paper is an attempt to focus totalitarianism and Communism in *Animal Farm*.

Orwell was a critic of Joseph Stalin and hostile to Moscow-directed Stalinism, especially after his experience with Spanish Civil War. He was the witness of the influence of Communist policy such as ceaseless arrests, censored newspapers and prowling hordes of armed police during the Spanish Civil War. Being a democratic socialist, he felt restless to see the shocking effects of totalitarian communism and decided to write about it. While expressing his desire, he writes: "Since the Spanish Civil War, 'I have been convinced that the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement' (CEU III 405-6, Meyer 15).

Orwell wanted to write against Stalinism in a simple manner that could be easily understood to everyone and appeal to the readers but he did not get the proper form and style for the presentation of his experience nearly for four years. In the mean time he wrote his most important essays namely "Inside the Whale" (1940), "Lion and Unicorn" (1941), "Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War" (1943), "Arthur Koestler" (1944) and others which focus his ideology of democratic socialism. While writing these essays, he was working on *Animal Farm*. Although novel was written between November 1943 and February 1944 (Lee 105), i.e. within a short period of three to four months, it was in the mind of Orwell since his return from the

Spain. Before 1939 Orwell was writing a book a year but after the publication of *Coming Up for Air* we find a gap of four years because his intention was purportedly "to make a complete break from his former polemical, propagandist way of writing and to concentrate on human relationship" (Lee 105). Secondly, he was thinking of the form for his novel in the mind and one day coincidentally his ideas were ignited by a village boy who was driving a huge cart-horse along a narrow path, whipping it whenever it tried to turn. It struck him that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them, and that men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat. Orwell proceeded to analyze Marx's theory from the animals' point of view and at that moment he got the idea of animal fable to devise his plan to expose the abuse of power in the communist Russia under the despotic rule of Stalin. The result of this exposure is *Animal Farm* (Meyer 19).

Orwell selected the beast fable intentionally because it is closer to criticism than to fiction in the full imaginative sense. According to Robert Lee "the essential characteristic of the beast fable is irony. The form that provides for the writer the power to keep his reader conscious simultaneously of the human traits, satirized and of the animals as animals" (107). In fact, fable is an important form of art to criticize and attack the social evils in an artistic mode and due to the very choice of beast fable Orwell's *Animal Farm* could gain success at a large scale than his previous work. Orwell used animal fable for his *Animal Farm* to get the fusion of his ideology about the politics of communism in Russia and the artistic strength of beast fable. By reducing the vast and complex history of the Russian Revolution to a short work describing talking animals on a single farm, Orwell is able to portray his subject in extremely simple, artistic and symbolic terms, presenting the moral lessons of the story with utmost clear, objective, and forceful way. Due to this fusion of artistic strength and political purpose, the novel achieved the substantial success in all over the world and is translated in to many languages. In the words of Robert Lee *Animal Farm* is "Orwell's finest book" - a "little masterpiece" in form and style (Lee 108).

ORWELL'S ANTI-COMMUNISTIC WORLD VIEW:

The socio-political referent of the novel shows that Orwell was against communism in Russia during Stalin's regime for the cause of democratic socialism. From the very beginning of his literary career he was interested in the social evils of the day but the totalitarian approach of communism that Orwell experienced in Spain made him to write against communism and the novel *Animal Farm* is the best example of it. After the publication of *Coming Up for Air* in 1939, Orwell dedicated his writing to explore the effects of totalitarianism, fascism and communism on the structure of the society. In order to save the world from these social evils and to have justice and equality he felt the need of democratic socialism. In fact the very world view of Orwell got strengthened after his experience in the Spanish Civil War that gave turn to the movement of communism. In his essay "Why I Write" Orwell writes: "The Spanish War and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. 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" (SEDE 07).

Before 1939, he was writing a book a year but after the publication of *Coming Up for Air* we find a gap of four years because his intention was purportedly "to make a complete break from his former polemical, propagandist way of writing and to concentrate on human relationship" (Lee 105). As his earlier work lacked a political purpose, he was thinking quite a different form to focus his both political and artistic purpose and finally he selected the beast fable to criticize and attack the totalitarian government in Russia under Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky to remind the readers the political history of Russia from 1917 to 1943 and to make them aware of the dangers of Stalinism. Secondly, Orwell preferred animal fable because it is closer to criticism than to fiction" (Wain 201). Due to the very choice of beast fable, Orwell could gain success at a large scale than his previous work. In fact, *Animal Farm* was the first book Orwell really sweated over (Lee 105). Orwell himself confesses in "Why I Write": "*Animal Farm* was the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose in to one whole" (SEDE 08).

Due to the fusion of Orwell's ideology about the politics of communism in Russia and the artistic strength of beast fable, the novel achieved the substantial success in all over the world and is translated in to many languages.

In his "Preface to Ukrainian translation of *Animal Farm*" Orwell explains that the origin of the novel is his experience during Spanish Civil War. Orwell, then, states that he went to Spain in December 1936, five months after the outbreak of the Civil War, to write newspaper articles. But he immediately joined P.O.U.M. (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) fight against fascism for democratic socialism, but when the Communists gained control of the Spanish Government, they began to hunt down the Trotskyites under the charge of conspiracy with the fascists. Being a Trotskyite, he was the target of these man-hunts but fortunately managed to escape alive and returned to England. During his stay in Spain, Orwell found that in Spain as well as in Russia the nature of the accusation was the same. As a result he felt restless and decided to write against fascism and communism. On his return to England he found numerous sensible people believing the most fantastic accounts of conspiracy, treachery and sabotage which the press reported from the Moscow trials. He also understood the negative influence of the Soviet myth upon the western socialist movement. When he came to know that the lies of totalitarian propaganda about Russia that appeared in the newspaper was accepted by the people innocently, he decided to provide the realistic picture of communism and to make people aware of the corruption of power. However, Orwell had a problem of the selection of form, style and manner of presentation of the abuse of power from communists and fascists. He wanted to tell the reality which could be intelligible to the people in all over the world and coincidentally his ideas were ignited by a village boy whipping a cart-horse and at that moment, he received the inspiration he needed to formulate his ideas into *Animal Farm*. While describing the origin of the novel Orwell writes:

On my return from Spain I thought of exposing the Soviet myth in a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone and which could be easily translated into other languages. However, the actual details of the story did not come to me for some time until one day (I was then living in a small village) I saw a little boy, perhaps ten years old, driving a huge cart-horse along a narrow path, whipping it whenever it tried to turn. It struck me that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them and that men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat. I proceeded to analyze Marx's theory from the animals' point of view (CELI II 405-6, Meyer 19).

In fact Orwell never visited Russia. His knowledge of the communist government under Stalin consists only of what can be learned by reading books and newspapers. Up to 1939, and even later, the majority of English people were incapable of assessing the true nature of the Nazi regime in Germany, and the Soviet regime in Russia. They were still to a large extent under the same sort of illusion. In order to analyze the Russian Revolution he used the animal fable in *Animal Farm* in which he emphasizes two points. First, that although the various episodes are taken from the actual history of the Russian Revolution, they are dealt with schematically and their chronological order is changed; this was necessary for the symmetry of the story. The second point has been missed by most critics, possibly because I did not emphasize it sufficiently. A number of readers may finish the book with the impression that it ends in the complete reconciliation of the pigs and the humans. That was not my intention, on the contrary I meant it to end on a loud note of discord, for I wrote it immediately after the Teheran Conference which everybody thought had established the best possible relations between the USSR and the West. I personally did not believe that such good relations would last long, and, as events have shown, I wasn't far wrong (CELI II 402).

In order to lift his story out of the particularities of its Russian model and give it the universality belitting the importance of its message, Orwell turned to the two ancient and overlapping traditions of political and animal fables such as Aesop's *Fables* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* to portray the evils of society in more effective ways. Because of their indirect approach, fables have a strong tradition in societies to attract readers. Moreover, by setting human problems in the animal kingdom, a writer can clearly interpretable tale by reducing the vast and complex history of the Russian Revolution to a short work describing talking animals on a single farm. So far the novel *Animal Farm* is considered it is clear that Orwell

is able to present his world view in extremely simple symbolic terms, presenting the moral lessons story with maximum clarity and objectivity.

In his essays and letters Orwell has made it clear that the novel is based upon the Russian revolution under the rule of Stalin. His main purpose of writing it was thoroughly propagandist. In this context Swingewood states, "*Animal Farm* is not an attack on socialism nor on revolution but on the totalitarian features which Russian socialism has developed in its denial of the genuine socialist ideas of Revolution" (Soc. Lit. 262). The novel addresses not only the corruption of revolution by its leaders but also how the indifference, ignorance, greed and myopia destroy any possibility of a Utopia. The novel thus, represents Orwell as an intellectual socialist who criticizes the oppressor for abusing the power, showing the false dream of Utopia. His criticism is directed at many things at bureaucracy, reports, waste of social wealth in order to bring about slavery of lower class. Orwell here exposes the hidden truth of Soviet myth through animal fable.

Orwell's world view of socialism is completely different from the socialism of Marx and Engels. He believed that property is the root cause of inequality in the society. So he suggested the abolition of private property for maintaining equality. Orwell was not agree with this view of Marx. In the novel, animals rebel against their master and become the equal owner of the farm. However, the situation of the lower animals does not change. Only the group of intellectual animals gets the benefit of it. The pigs with the help of their intellect violate the rules of the farm and become powerful and later by abusing power make the lives of other animals miserable. In the beginning they believe in "all animals are equal" but finally they make other animals to believe in "all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others". This was the case in Russia. So he rejects the Marxist ideology and focuses the psychological forces of human nature that Marxism ignored. His concept of socialism is not based on economics but on psychology and ethics. According to Sant Bal Singh says, "in *Animal Farm* Orwell examines revolutionary psychology and emphasizes the fact that the political changes without moral direction are sure to push society to the brink of nothingness and chaos, where 'some animals are more equal than others' (45).

CONCLUSION:

In a nutshell, *Animal Farm* is an allegory of Soviet Russia under Stalin regime. Orwell was eager to publish the corruption of Soviet Union when Stalin was at the height of power and popularity and overcoming the problems of publication it was published in 1938 by Secker and Warburg and within a short period a millions of its copies were sold in all over the world. It is true that the social referent or context is the major determining factor of the emergence of *Animal Farm*; it was the role of gatekeepers which played the dominant role in making the novel popular among the readers in the form of prints, reviews, criticism and film.

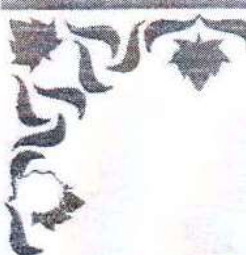
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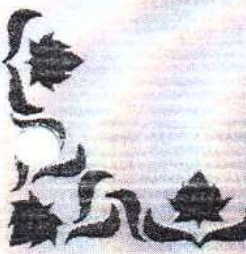
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