

ISSN-0976-8165



# THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

**VOL. 15 ISSUE-3 JUNE 2024**

**15 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS**

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ISSN 2278-9529

**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**  
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## George Orwell's Vision of Life

**Dr. Arati Sinha**

Professor,  
Post Graduate Department of English,  
T.M Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur.  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12671829>

**Article History:** Submitted-16/03/2024, Revised-20/06/2024, Accepted-25/06/2024, Published-30/06/2024.

### **Abstract:**

George Orwell was one of those writers whom name and fame eluded in their lifetime. It is only when the times changed and when the revaluation of existing literature was needed that Orwell's worth as a philosopher on life and things could be established. His two eponymous works 'Animal Farm' and 'Nineteen Eighty Four' were insufficient to establish him as moralistic and individualistic thinker who honestly and brutally wrote against the British empire. Several of his other essays, journalistic writings and letters bring about his frank thoughts about the falsity of religion, snobbishness of English people and writers, the ills of human suffering and social injustice. The moralist in him became the novelist for individual freedom and freedom of a nation as well. The imperial England for him became the symbol of 'totalitarian state' which he has cynically and satirically projected in 'Nineteen Eighty Four' this a version with Fascism and Nazism took the shape of 'Animal Farm'. The terms used by him in the works like 'Big Brother' is watching you' has become cult phrases and to be 'Orwellian' is simply understood as being authoritarian and totalitarian. As such the aim of this article is to bring about the vision of life and matters of George Orwell, one of the world's most influential writers.

**Keywords: Individualism, Socialism, Totalitarianism, Decency and Moralism.**

George Orwell's fame rests mainly on the publication of his two novels 'Animal Farm' in 1945 and 'Nineteen Eighty Four' in 1949. Besides those two memorable works, he has written seven more novels, a number of essays of literary, political and sociological nature, letters and volumes of journalistic works of high artistic order. His literary career covers chiefly the period of 1930's and late 1940's. Throughout his life he wrote in one form or the other, what he thought honestly or felt deeply, be it the falsity of religion or the snobbishness of English people and

writers. Although, very few books of reviews or criticism were published on him in his lifetime, he gained much acclaim and appreciation posthumously. Through his two eponymous novels and other literary works Orwell comes before us as a philosopher who reflects on life and things in which he honestly believes. E.M. Forster has said correctly:

To have a philosophy – even a poetic and emotional philosophy like Hardy's and Conrad's – leads to reflections on life and things. And this is how a common link between the vision of a novelist and the thinking pattern of the readers is established, But the thinker in Orwell did not run counter to the moral artist in him. And it was this preference for 'moral' concern which limited the fictional art of Orwell.

At this earliest he discovered dual worlds of human society, the moneyed and the impoverished. The world of poverty, sickness, fear, guilt and want, which he explored, became the basic pattern of his life. His sad experience of "crossgate" and his posting in Burma strongly influenced the growth of a social conscience in him. His love for the pre-war England, the intensive industrialization and urbanization of the English Countryside filled in him a feeling of 'paradise lost'. Consequently, a deep sense of gloom and dismay became the dominant strain in his life and works.

The moral vision of Orwell, the novelist is truly shaped against the background of Orwell, the man. And he was obviously, a man of ambivalent nature. He hated the experiences of his childhood but loved the time for its colorfulness and generosity. What repulsed his good sense was sure to be opposed by him. If he attacked the Left wing politicians vehemently he did not spare the Right for their wrongs. He was chivalric in spirit like Quixote. He searched after the 'truth' very diligently without caring for the offense it might bring to others. To Quote George Woodcock :

What made him exceptional – and more than a little eccentric in the eyes of his contemporaries – was the fact that he also tried to work out his theories in action and then to give his actions shape in literature.

(P.13)

He valued the freedom of a nation as much as he loved the freedom of an individual. When he was working in B.B.C and as an editor in 'Tribune', he forcefully advocated his liberal views in favour of the Indian people. In 'As I please' column of the 'Tribune', Jan 28, 1944 he protested against the arrest of Mr. Suresh Vaidya, an Indian journalist living in England who had refused military service in his essay 'Reflections on Gandhi', Orwell promised the nationalistic feelings of Gandhi, who, he said, was capable of shaking the 'Empire' by his spiritual power. He was highly impressed by the 'Mahatma's' courage, ethics and honesty.

Orwell's Burmese experiences might have unleashed his bitterness against the English society and its ambivalent values but his patriotism for the British soil and culture was unflinching. In his famous essay 'England your England' written during the war he asserts that it is your civilization, it is you. However much you hate it or laugh at it, you will never be happy away from it. He was against the insensitive following of 'Stalinism' by the intellectuals of his age. He raised his voice against the social and moral implications of his belief. According to him the English people' had the characteristic inability to think 'Logically'. In spite of being a bitter critic of the English society, he loved the English landscape, Scenery, and literature very passionately.

On closure perusal of Orwell's life and writing, four distinct phases of growth and shaping of his vision of life comes on the surface. First and foremost characteristic is his rebellions nature. Like Prometheus he seems to be defying and challenging the existing ways of the universe where the innocent has to suffer and the righteous suppressed. He sets out with a definite intention to raise his voice against the ills of human suffering and injustice. Secondly, his thought pattern was such that he never allowed his personal opinions to cloud his respect for the men at responsible places. If he criticized Kipling on matters of colonial imperialism, he also appreciated him for his discipline, order and patriotism. Thirdly, he was basically like an 18<sup>th</sup> century English 'Moralist' who laid much emphasis on the 'enlightened rationality' of a writer. Fourthly, his romantic spirit could not be missed out in his works which always takes him back to the fishing springs and the whirling pools of his childhood days.

Rachael Reese has rightly observed;

These four strains were combined in him to form a well-balanced and harmonious character, which might have been happy one in spite of his philosophical pessimism, if the times... had been less unpropitious. (P.11)

Like D. H. Lawrence, Orwell showed a great respect and love for family life. For him 'family' is an integrating force in the life of a man. It is vital for the right growth of an individual and a cordial society. However, boring and painful a family may be, it feels pleasing and satisfying to come back to its folds after much wondering. Although he disliked his childhood family days, in his essays 'The Road to Wigen Pier' and 'Coming up for Air' he has idealised his parental life. In his most melancholic essay 'Such, such were the Joys' he has described his home as "a place ruled by love rather than fear". This feeling of family love became the basic of his socialistic philosophy and the want of which in the modern political administration created in his mind the image of the totalitarian society in 'Nineteen Eighty Four'. In this novel Orwell has described most horribly, a world, where the very essence of domestic spirit is lacking within a family and where children work as spies for the state against their parents.

Orwell regarded sexual appeal as a natural source of human pleasure and a necessary part of creativity. In the society of "Nineteen Eighty Four" the proles lead a free sexual life as against the ruling class. In the opinion of the novelist, this is the real pleasure of life. In the essay 'The Art of Donald McGill', Orwell has appreciated the sexually suggestive pictures of the artist as highly creative. Actually the writer interconnects marriage and domestic love with the love of the society and the state. This chain of life represents harmonious indestructible force of human civilisation running down from the past to the future. In 'Nineteen Eighty Four,' Winston, just before his arrest views a sight which reaffirms his belief in continual force of life :

The woman down there had no mind, she had only strong drive, a warm heart, and a fertile belly. He wondered how many children she had given birth to over thirty unbroken years. At the end of it she was still singing. (P.124)

The prole woman stood as a symbol of family in the social terms, the unit of reproduction and growth. The family life is symbolic of vitality set against the deathly features of state life in Oceania. His deep affinity with primitive design of life shows a close affinity with D. H. Lawrence.

Such a man who genuinely believed in the natural charms of life and essential dignity of man can never be a pessimist, although labelled as such by critics.

Orwell as a writer was essentially devoted to a struggle against imperialism, inequality and fascism. His political insights forever demanded a worker's government which he aimed at achieving through 'democratic socialism' As against the Marxist socialism, it aimed for a Russian pattern of socialist government. It was supposed to curb massive employment and 'growing menace' of Hitler. Orwell's experiences of the Spanish civil war had taught him that communist society had failed to emancipate man from the real evils and that real socialism was still far off. He believed that in such a state of crisis there is no importance of individual loyalty. It must owe to the state only which disallows roughly all human passions and emotions. This was a complex philosophy and as such practically not viable. Still in keeping with this belief animals in 'Animal Farm' follow this principle in letter, but in the long run it turns out to be a failure in the absence of a moral base. It points towards the fact that Orwell wanted this change not by destroying the established fabric of the society but by introducing moral methods. John Atkins has rightly observed:

Orwell stuck to the simple and positive conception of socialism based on general ideas of brotherhood, fair play and honest dealing and he distrusts the involved metaphysics of Marxist thought... He did not believe in deliberately destroying a relatively happy society simply because it was not organised in a particular way. (P.13)

In other words, Orwell advocated for a world where there will be restriction on the accumulation of power and property in the hands of individual and will be governed in a democratic way by selected members of the people.

Orwell believed that class-distinction in England was the greatest enemy in the way of socialism. To break this system people have to change their habits, tastes and prejudices first. The 'book trained socialists' of England, the so called 'Bourgeois' were inwardly clung to their class character. In spite of raising their voice against it from a pulpit they felt disgusted to come close to the workers/laborers. They helped indirectly in suppressing the worker's revolution. In 'The Road To Wigen Pier' he has described 'mechanical growth' also as an inimical force to socialism.

Machines cause the growth of unemployment among workers and thus give more teeth to the capitalists to exploit them. He has called this machine worship as 'the stupid cult'. Actually Orwell's philosophy of socialism is merely limited to economic justice but extends up to cultural and moral change in general outlook of man.

Orwell's views on the socialistic revolution in England were really those of a moralist, of a social saint who pleaded for a change in the existing pattern of society not through a revolutionary seizure of power, but only through the spiritual operation of reason in man. No revolution can succeed without a change in human heart. The animal rebellion in 'Animal Farm' remained a failure as the rulers were devoid of moral sense. Throughout his works, he proposed the belief that the modern politics has lost its contact with religion, literature and morals. The world of Oceania in 'Nineteen Eighty Four' is devoid of emotional sense and has least careers with morals and principles. Hence, he was always nostalgic about the past society for its culture, religion and decency. Orwell's fear of a totalitarian government is based on the point that politicians keep their people in the dark and suppress liberal thinking. It helps in bringing about a political chaos in the state with a deliberate extermination of language and literature. The totalitarian state of Oceania in 'Nineteen Eighty Four' has introduced 'New Speak', a language devised to meet 'Ingsoc'. It is basically meant not to extend the range of thought but to control it. In this world, words such as 'honour', 'justice', 'morality', 'Internationalism', 'democracy', 'science' and 'religion' have completely vanished. Huxley also portrayed a world like this in the novel 'Brave New World'. The dystopian world of 'Nineteen Eighty Four' was actually a satiric depiction of the intellectual and political crises of his time which had angered Orwell. Through out his writing career he dedicated his life to the defense of individual liberty and freedom of Speech.

'Nineteen Eighty Four' as such can be also regarded as the document of Orwell's growing bitterness and feeling of frustration against the loss of political liberalism and cultural decency. In this regard Alan Sandison has observed;

In Orwell it is unquestionable the negative conscience which predominates the obverse of his fierce individualism being an almost obsessive in preoccupation with guilt and sin. (P.55)

But on deeper analysis of his life, his mission and his literary works suggest that he was neither a defeatist nor a pessimist. In fact he loved humanity and had a passionate desire to live in a state of full freedom. His pessimism was only a means of giving warning against the prevailing evil situation, a natural one to come of totalitarian dominance. He was afraid that there was a lack of human feeling in the writing produced after the first world war. He disliked Rudyard Kipling for his imperialistic attitude but he certainly appreciated his humanitarian instinct. His love for feelings of the common man made him prefer Charles Dickens. Orwell protested against the dominance of reason in the life of man. He believed, like Lawrence, that “My blood is always wiser than the intellect”. The contemporary modern world of ‘big brother’ and ‘black moustache’ had disillusioned him and in his concern for humanity and decency he might appear cynical to critics. But as Bertrand Russell suggests, this feeling for common man has prevented Orwell from becoming a prophet of his age.

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