GEORGE ORWELL’S ANIMAL FARM: A STUDY

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Abstract

George Orwell, born in Bengal, India, in 1903, is a British novelist of very high rank. Though he has written many literary works like Down and Out in Paris and London, A Clergyman’s Daughter, and Homage to Catalonia, he is mainly remembered for his two masterpieces, namely Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty Four. His novel, Animal Farm is an all-time classic, read with equal interest by the children as well as adults. It is due to its enormous popularity that the present research paper aims to study various aspects of this novel like its historical background and allegorical and satirical elements present in it and find out how and to what extent these aspects contribute to its immense popularity.

Key Words: George Orwell, Animal Farm, Allegory, fable, satire.

George Orwell is a well-known name in 20th century literary circles. He was born on June 25, 1903 in Bengal, India. Actually, George Orwell was the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair. He was educated at Eton College in England. After completing his education Orwell joined Indian Imperial Police in Burma and remained there for more than five years. His first hand experiences here helped him a lot in his literary career. However, during the early years of his literary career, he faced many frustrations. He worked hard trying his hand in writing but failed. The experience of these years helped him write his first book, entitled Down and Out in Paris and London. Then he joined the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War. He was very critical of Communism. His experiences during the Spanish Civil War have a great impact on his latter writing, particularly ‘Animal Farm’ and ‘Nineteen Eighty Four’. Then he worked as a writer of a weekly radio political commentary for B.B.C. Orwell is known for his
doubts which he raised about all official or accepted versions of history. Actually he was regarded highly for his views about history. Such a great writer died of lung ailment on January 21, 1950 in London leaving behind him the works like *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *A Clergyman’s Daughter* (1935), *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), *Coming up for Air* (1939), *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949).

George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* is an allegorical novel. Its story deals with the sad triumph of evil over good. Here George Orwell tells us the story of animals who overthrow the humans and create their own world. They want to create an ideal place, a paradise where each and every member of the society will get an equal opportunity to develop his/her own self. With this purpose in mind the animals revolt against Mr. Jones, the owner of the farm, and overthrow him. But once the new Animal Farm is created the animals realize that their lives are not better now than they were before. The reason behind the degeneration of the Animal farm is the selfish behavior of the pigs. At the end of the novel the pigs are shown behaving like the human beings, imitating all their vices.

George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* is a novel having allegorical meaning hidden under the animal story. Actually there is a close relationship between *Animal Farm* and ‘Russian Revolution’. In fact Orwell himself wrote “that *Animal Farm* was the first book in which he had tried, with full consciousness of what he was doing, “to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole”. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_Farm) The close reading of this novel shows that the characters and the events in ‘Animal Farm’ are based on the history of Russia during the period of World War I.

Many scholars have discovered very close links of the characters of novel with that of historical figures in Russia. For example, Stalin is represented as Napoleon, Trotsky is represented as Snowball in the novel and Boxer represents the faithful proletariat.

In the same way, the events in the novel and the events in Russian history are also found to be similar. For example, Russian Civil War is represented in the form of the Battle of the Cowshed in *Animal Farm*. The construction of windmill represents the industrialization of Russia. Mr. Jones’ struggle against the animals is supported by the men from the neighboring farms of Foxwoods and Pinch Field. This incident in the novel has similarity in the military assistance given to Russia by some of the western countries. In the history of Russia, Stalin started collective farming which was not liked by feudal lords. So
they revolted against Stalin. George Orwell has presented this event as the revolt of hens against Napoleon’s decision of selling their eggs.

We are told that Napoleon used to conduct meetings with the human beings on the farm house. These meetings of Napoleon are the reflection of the meetings held between Stalin and Churchill in Russia. Old Major’s skull in the novel refers to Lenin’s body. Similarly Lenin’s death corresponds with the death of Old Major in ‘Animal Farm’.

The principles of animalism accepted by the animals at the time of establishing the Animal farm reflect the philosophy of Marx and Lenin. While touching upon these principles, Old Major says:

“I have little more to say. I merely repeat, remember always your duty of enmity towards Man and all his ways. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. And remember also that in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices. No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in trade. All the habits of Man are evil. And, above all, no animal must ever tyrannise over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers. No animal must ever kill any other animal. All animals are equal.” (Orwell, 1945: p.5)

These principles are almost similar to the philosophy of Marx upheld by Lenin in Russia. Even. Mr. Jones, the owner of ‘Manor Farm’, represents the Czar of Russia. Stalin’s signing of non-aggression pact with Germany is represented in the form of Napoleon’s sale of timber to Frederick. Hitler’s declaration of war on Russia is Frederick’s war on Animal Farm in the novel. These incidents show that ‘Animal Farm’ has very close links with Russian history. It means George Orwell has used the form of allegory to present Russian history in front of the readers. Therefore, it can be said that George Orwell’s novel has exposed the perversion of Marxist socialism by Communism.

The plot of the novel Animal Farm is constructed skillfully by George Orwell. It is divided into ten chapters, each chapter dealing with various stages in the development of the plot of novel. The plot is constructed in a very simple and straight forward manner. It begins with the first chapter wherein Old Major speaks about his dream. Then the action rises with
the rebellion of the animals against the humans and establishment of Animal Farm. Then it moves to the conflict between Napoleon and Snowball over the control of Animal Farm and this conflict results in expelling Snowball from the Animal Farm. The stage of climax is reached with Napoleon’s declaration of Animal Farm as a republic and electing himself as the President. At the end, the action comes to the same point from where it has started with the only difference that now the animals are exploited not by the humans but by the animals themselves. Thus it can be said that the plot development of this novel is cyclical wherein the skill of the novelist lies.

Chapter I of the novel begins with the introduction to the main characters and events of the story. We are told that Mr. Jones is an irresponsible owner of Manor Farm. He is a drunkard and does not take proper care of the animals on the farm. It results in displeasure amongst the animals. Old Major holds a meeting in which he encourages the animals to rebel against cruel Mr. Jones. In his speech Old Major points out that the condition of animals is deplorable and it is because of the exploitative nature of Mr. Jones. The meeting comes to an end with an inspirational song. When all the animals sing the song ‘Beasts of England’ loudly, Mr. Jones is awakened from sleep and he fires in the direction of the barn thinking that some fox might have entered into the barn.

After this meeting all the animals prepare for the great rebellion and as soon as they get an opportunity, they fight against Mr. Jones. In this rebellion the animals get the victory. Now they are the owners of the farm. They rename the farm as ‘Animal Farm’. They also devise the laws to run this new world. After some days, Mr. Jones tries to get back the control of his farm but is defeated by the animals in the battle of cowshed. Snowball and Boxer fight very bravely in this battle. For the outstanding courage they have shown, they are awarded a medal with an inscription ‘Animal Hero First Class.

Once a new state has been established, there begins the conflict for its leadership. In animal world, the rivals for leadership are Snowball and Napoleon. The rivalry between them goes on increasing with each passing day. They oppose each other whenever they get an opportunity to do so. Napoleon opposes Snowball’s idea of constructing a windmill. When he realizes that Snowball is supported by other animals, Napoleon makes his dogs chase Snowball off of the Animal Farm. Once Snowball is out of his way, Napoleon declares himself as the President of the new state. After becoming the leader of the Animal Farm, Napoleon controls every activity of the farm. The weekly meetings are stopped. He changes the laws of the farm to suit his own needs. His atrocities on animals go on increasing with
passing of time. The animals are forced to confess as per the desires of the leaders and then they are publicly executed. Napoleon has completely changed. He has started to behave like a human being. He:

> "was seen strolling in the farmhouse garden with a pipe in his mouth | no, not even when the pigs took Mr. Jones's clothes out of the wardrobes and put them on, Napoleon himself appearing in a black coat, ratcatcher breeches, and leather leggings, while his favourite sow appeared in the watered silk dress which Mrs. Jones had been used to wear on Sundays." (Orwell, 1945: p.50)

It was not only Napoleon but all the pigs behaved like human beings. They have begun to walk on hind legs, drink alcohol, enter in trade, use money, sleep in bed, talk on telephone and smoke tobacco. At the end of the novel George Orwell has shown Napoleon as a totally changed person. He exhibits all the vices of humans. In this way George Orwell has nicely constructed the plot of his novel.

*Animal farm* is a story that shows the readers the birth of a new world and its leader. Here Orwell has told us a story of the foundation of ‘Animal Farm’, a new world of animals and the rise of Napoleon as its leader. George Orwell has written this novel as a political allegory and so Napoleon in ‘Animal Farm’ represents Joseph Stalin of Russia. Through this novel, Orwell has tried to show us how Stalin rose to power and exploited the people of Russia.

Actually, the character of Napoleon is a manifestation of our hidden desire for power. Throughout the novel, Napoleon dominates the action. While describing the character of Napoleon, George Orwell says that “Napoleon was a large, rather fierce-looking Berkshire boar, the only Berkshire on the farm, not much of a talker, but with a reputation for getting his own way.” (Orwell, 1945: P.6) He is given for action rather than to speak. He likes to change the situation according to his own desire.

It is seen in his driving away Snowball from the farm. When he realizes that Snowball is becoming a threat for his desire to be the leader of the farm, he makes his army of dogs attack Snowball and chases him off of the farm. After Snowball is away, presidential election was held on the farm for which

> "There was only one candidate, Napoleon, who was elected unanimously. On the same day it was given out that fresh documents
had been discovered which revealed further details about Snowball’s complicity with Jones. It now appeared that Snowball had not, as the animals had previously imagined, merely attempted to lose the Battle of the Cowshed by means of a stratagem, but had been openly fighting on Jones's side. In fact, it was he who had actually been the leader of the human forces, and had charged into battle with the words ‘Long live Humanity!’ on his lips. The wounds on Snowball's back, which a few of the animals still remembered to have seen, had been inflicted by Napoleon's teeth.”(Orwell, 1945: p.43)

Thus, by painting Snowball as a villain, Napoleon succeeds in creating his favorable picture on the minds of the animals. Once all the power is concentrated in his hands. So he uses it to suit his purpose. Now no other animal dares to oppose him. According to George Orwell, ‘Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely’. It is seen with reference to Napoleon. When he comes to know that the animals on the farm like Snowball’s plan of windmill, he opposes the plan. But once Snowball is out of his way to power, Napoleon implements the same plan of windmill. He makes the animals work hard for the construction of the windmill.

With the passing of the time Napoleon becomes so powerful that no animal dares to oppose him. And this accumulation of power corrupts him further. Any opposition to Napoleon or his ideas is considered treason and the culprit is mercilessly punished for it. While describing the atrocities of Napoleon, we are told:

“The three hens who had been the ringleaders in the attempted rebellion over the eggs now came forward and stated that Snowball had appeared to them in a dream and incited them to disobey Napoleon's orders. They, too, were slaughtered. Then a goose came forward and confessed to having secreted six ears of corn during the last year’s harvest and eaten them in the night. Then a sheep confessed to having urinated in the drinking pool | urged to do this, so she said, by Snowball | and two other sheep confessed to having murdered an old ram, an especially devoted follower of Napoleon, by chasing him round and round a bonfire when he was suffering from a cough. They were all slain on the spot. And so the tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before
Napoleon’s feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones.” (Orwell, 1945: p.33)

He adopts all the manners of humans. He changes the seven commandments. By breaking these commandments, he desires to lead a luxurious life like human beings. He begins to walk upright on hind legs, drink alcohol, smoke tobacco, and sleep in bed, indulge in trade with humans and wear human clothes. Actually, all the human habits were considered to be vicious by the animals. And that is why it was decided to discard them. But the power in his hands degrades Napoleon and he exhibits all the corrupt human practices.

Like all the dictators of the world, Napoleon considers himself all powerful and the cause of everything good that happens on Animal Farm. The credit goes to him if the hens lay five eggs, or the water of the farm tastes well. He picks up every possible opportunity to keep the animals under his control. His staunch follower, Squealer, propagates his ideas among the animals and makes them believe that Napoleon acts for their betterment.

We see Napoleon as a true representative of the modern leaders. These leaders gain power after the revolution and use that power for their own well-being. This power corrupts these leaders as it has corrupted Napoleon in Animal farm. All over the world, it can be seen that modern leaders work first for themselves and then for their own community and at the end they think about others.

In Animal Farm Napoleon becomes the leader and then works for the development of his own community, that is the community of pigs. The pigs are declared as a ruling class and are not required to work to earn their living. He changes the commandment of the animal world which reads ‘All animals are equal’ to

‘ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS.’ (Orwell, 1945: pp.51-52)

He does so to protect the interest of the pig community. The pigs are given the responsibility of supervising the work of other animals. They are given the opportunity to learn to read and write. The milk and apples are reserved only for pigs. Thus the community of pigs prospers in the animal world. The same thing happens in the modern world too. From the revolution, only a few are benefited while the lives of the rest of the common people remain unchanged. Thus the novel ‘Animal Farm’ narrates the story of Napoleon’s rise to power and his degeneration from the original principles of animalism.
George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* is a simple story of animals. And so it is considered to be the fit book to be read by children. But there is a deep meaning hidden beneath the simple story of the animals. Actually, Orwell meant it to be an allegory of Russian history from the World War I up to the end of World War II. The characters and the events in the novel correspond with the historical figures and events of Russia during the above-mentioned period in Russian history.

Mr. Jones stands for the Czar of Russia. Napoleon and Snowball respectively represent Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky, the leaders of Communist Russia. Boxer, the horse, stands for the Proletariat class of Russia whereas Moses stands for Russian Orthodox Church. Mollie, the silly mare represents the Russian citizens who fled from Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Old Major’s body represents Lenin’s body.

Even the incidents and events in *Animal Farm* have the similarities in Russian history. For example, the Civil War that broke after the Russian Revolution is represented as the Battle of Cowshed in *Animal Farm*. In the novel, Mr. Jones receives the help from the neighboring farms to fight against the animals. This event has equivalence in Russian history when Russian forces received help from Western countries to fight against Germany. The Battle of Windmill represents Russian industrialization.

The Seven Commandments of Animal Farm are like the Communist Manifesto. Old Major’s philosophy stands for the philosophy of Lenin and Marx and his death stands for the death of Lenin. The incident of destroying the Windmill is the representation of the destruction of Stalingrad. Hitler’s declaration of war on Russia is represented as Frederick’s declaration of war on Animal Farm. Napoleon’s agreement of selling Timber to Frederick stands for Stalin’s signing non aggression pact with Hitler’s Germany. Feudal Lords’ revolt against Stalin is the Hens’ revolt against Napoleon in the novel. Thus many of the characters and events in *Animal Farm* represent the real persons and incidents in Russian history. So the novel can be called as a fine piece of allegory.

George Orwell’s novel *Animal Farm* can be read as a simple story book for children as well as a political satire for the adult readers. It is a skillful blending of critical attitude with wit and humor that leads to ridiculing the follies of man’s political behavior. A satire is a work of art that exposes the follies of the people, makes their fun and aims at correcting those follies. It has to be terse and precise to create the desired effect. In the light of this discussion, ‘Animal Farm’ can be called a political satire as it exposes communism as a political system.
While following the tradition of a political satire Orwell has exposed the principles of communism. He seems to say that though these principles are noble and ideal but the deep-rooted evil in human nature prevents the man from implementing them. Through this novel, Orwell has tried to show that power corrupts the people. It is illustrated by showing Napoleon’s rise to power and then his corruption. Once the power is accumulated in his hands, Napoleon turns the Animal Farm into autocratic state. When Joseph Stalin tried to turn Russia from a socialist state to a communist state, Germany and Spain protested against it. But Stalin followed his political philosophy and Russia was turned into a communist state. However, Orwell is criticized for his satire by saying that:

“It seems to me that the failure of this book arises from the fact that the satire deals not with something the author has experienced, but rather with stereotyped ideas about a country which he probably does not know very well”. (Soule, 1946: pp. 266–267)

The biographical account of George Orwell shows that he had first hand experiences of communism. And his Animal Farm is the result of these experiences combined with his anti-Stalin obsession. Orwell attacks Russian communism through his novel. He ridicules such a political system which corrupts the human beings. It can be safely said that Orwell has succeeded in passing the message that the history of mankind shows that public memory is short lived and the people quickly forget the past. Orwell ridicules people for their short memory but he does not abuse them for it. The greatness of Orwell’s novel lies in the principle which says ‘hate the sin not the sinner’. And that is why at the end of the novel, the readers hate not Napoleon, the sinner, but his corrupt ways.

George Orwell’s Animal Farm is a story fit to be read by the school children. But it can also be considered as a fable. A fable is a story of animals in which the characters are animals who think, talk, act, fight and behave like human beings. In this sense ‘Animal Farm’ can be considered as a fable, wherein the characters are animals. In Animal Farm we have Napoleon, Snowball, Cleaver and Old Major who are pigs. Then Boxer is a cart horse, Mollie is a mare and Moses is a raven. There are dogs, goats, and hens. All these animals talk, fight, think, act and behave like human beings. Not only this, they come together and rebel against their exploiter, Mr. Jones and establish their own world.

Orwell follows the tradition of a fable by creating his characters and situations to fulfill a specific purpose in his mind. For example, the corrupt class of pigs in the novel is
created to show that everywhere there are people who get corrupt after getting power. Similarly the character of Squealer is created to propagate the ideas of Napoleon and persuade the animals to believe in him. Through the character of Squealer, Orwell tells us that the public can be made to believe anything if it is told boldly and persistently. The character of Boxer reminds us of the large proletarian class of any country which is exploited by the capitalists. In short, George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* has the characteristic features of a fable.

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