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Dismantling Panopticonic Regime: The Study of Orwell's 1984

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Abstract

The study is to find the elements of despotism for the establishment of totalitarian regimes and to reduce them to an absurdity. The aim is to highlight the failure of totalitarian regimes in terms of ground realities. Historical instances show that such governments used various techniques like, insurgency, censorship of media, changing the facts and oppression of the masses by the totalitarian rulers to sustain the authority in the state. The study has highlighted the ineffectuality of the regime in the selected text in the light of totalitarian absurdity on practical grounds. The theoretical framework used is totalitarian absurdity. It has looked for the totalitarian governments and the tactics they used to rule the masses and has reduced them to an absurdity as they failed badly eventually. It is argued that there had been a constant effort on the part of the state to suppress the masses but there had always been a revolt by the oppressed masses who denied the authority. The more the authority proved to be strict, the more it augmented the potential of subjugated masses to show revolt. Thus, one can rightly say that totalitarian regimes besides their every effort can be drawn to an absurdity.

Keywords: Totalitarianism, Absurdity, Totalitarian Absurdity, Totalitarian Regime,

Despotism, Oppression, Censorship, Authoritarianism.

1. Introduction

The article deals with the absurdity of the totalitarian regime in terms of practical implication. Every absolute authority tries the best to control the state in every field of life, but it happens in majority of the times that they fail badly. The selected work has also highlighted an authority which is highly concentrated, and the power exists only in one hand, but it cannot sustain itself eventually. This issue has been seen in history and the current decade is also enriched with the same old practice. An analysis of such regimes across the history shows that they repeatedly used same techniques. The epicentre of these techniques had been the concentration of power in single person or institution and rest of the departments had been mere puppets in the hands of the singular hand.

The research has taken into consideration this major idea whether such regimes can sustain themselves and is there any possibility to control all the affairs of the state to such a greater extent? It has traced the scarce possibility of the designs in the few cubic centimetre (brains)

of the characters. The idea has further been strengthened with the incorporation of the factual statistics which had been accumulated while experiencing such regimes.

People of the mid twentieth century as well as the current decade have similar destinies. Their lives have been under trouble and the reason behind this horrific life is absolute governments. These regimes have been seen to dismantle political system, conditions of the masses are deteriorated, ascertain to be highly devastating, terrible, and dreadful. A sect of society is exploited, tortured, and marginalized. They are decentred by the despotic tendencies of the ruling authority and the use of power and authority is highly concentrated. On the other hand, there is a constant struggle on the part of the subjugated masses to dismantle such authority which leads to a revolution.

2. Literature Review

A brief review of the literature has been given to find implications of totalitarianism in fiction. George Orwell's *Animal Form* is the dystopian literature. Dystopian literature represents a state where everything is opposite to the Utopian state. The novella can be implied to the politics of the time of George Orwell and in fact to a universal utopian society which is drawn to the dystopian. Sana Nawaz authored an article *Allegory and Satire in Animal Form by George Orwell* (2005) and says that his novella is an allegory, standing for human society. The novella also stands for a satire on the Russian revolution. A dream of an old major is materialized by animal, pigs as their leaders. Slowly the problems of leaderships arise, and the commandments are broken one by one. The article emphasizes that fear, a typical mechanism for the establishment of totalitarianism is practiced throughout the novella to stop any kind of revolt.

Marcelo Pelissioli (2008) in his research *From Allegory into Symbol: Revisiting George Orwell's Animal Farm* says that the novel is an allegory and symbolic in nature. Pelissioli is of the opinion that the novel is based on totalitarianism and can be linked to the days of Orwell's life. Stella Zavera Monica says in her thesis *Tyrannical Control over the Proletariat in George Orwell's Animal Farm* that *Animal Farm* is inspired by Russian Revolution in 1917. The thesis aims at analysing the various aspects of the novel. The main aspect is to see how Mr. Jones and Napoleon control the farm.

The English literature is rich in depiction of totalitarian regimes. Huxley wrote his *Brave New World* to represent the totalitarian society. Robert S. Baker *The Dark Historic Page: Social Satire and Historicism in the Novels of Aldous Huxley* says that they give a satirical look of a totalitarian society of the future, in which the trends of Huxley's day have been taken to extremes. When an outsider encounters this world, he cannot accept its values and chooses to die rather than try to conform to this *Brave New World*. Peter Edgerly is of the opinion that it is a kind of the government where few elites have the freedom of choice while the rest of the masses are conditioned to follow them blindly since they are in their embryonic stage. There exists no room for free will, creativity, imagination, or diversity and these all lead to conflict, war, and destruction.

Yevgeny Zamyatin's We was published in 1921. The novel is set in urban nation constructed entirely formed of a glass packed situation which assesses mass surveillance. The structure is like a Panopticon. The value of freedom is taken from the citizens and given to the authorities. David Bell in his article Fail Again. Fail Better says that We works as a double satirical critique on Leninism and Capitalism alike as both were the periods of excessive totalitarianism.

3. Research Methodology: Totalitarian Absurdity

To analyse the idea of totalitarian regime, the ideology of Hannah Arendt paves the way. In her book *Origin of Totalitarianism* (1951), she is of the opinion that totalitarianism was established because of two reasons. Firstly, prejudice against one race and secondly, imperialism. Thus, the despotic tendencies inside one state were always prejudiced against the citizens. Similarly, imperialism is clear in today's world while using the techniques of totalitarian regimes. So, her ideas are employed here to highlight the tyrannical exertions of the state's governments inside the state and beyond the boundaries.

On the other hand, the research has also investigated the concept of absurdity put forward by Albert Camus. His major ideas revolve around the meaninglessness and indifference of the universe. He considered absurd, the defining and important characteristic of modern world. His idea is based on the notion that life is meaningless and nonsensical. Hence, it draws the whole concept of world to the notion of absurdity. The approach which has been used to conduct this research is eclectic in nature due to the unavailability of a single focal point. The researchers give a composite application of the said approaches. Totalitarianism highlights the absolutism of power while absurdism draws the same centrality of power into nothingness which can be a jointly called as totalitarian absurdity.

3.2. Textual Analysis as Methodology

This research is eclectic in nature. It incorporates fictional and factual data to justify the proposed questions. The researcher has also tried to compare the fictional works with factual analysis of the totalitarian regimes. So, the technique is reflexive in nature. The term reflexive has been define by Alvesson and Skoldberg as, "reflection means interpreting one's own interpretation, looking at one's own perspectives from other's perspectives and turning a self-critical eye into one's own authority as interpreter" (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000,p. vii).

The researcher focused on the subjective analysis of the primary texts. There is greater possibility of no objective interpretation. Culture and historical background, and changing context provide enough space for the subjective interpretation to any academic and researcher. The idea has been given by Terry Eagleton who proposed certain simple questions. He asks, "What is the meaning of the literary text? How relevant to this is author's intention? Can we hope to understand works which are culturally and historically alien to us? Is 'objective' understanding possible or is all understanding relative to our own historical situation?" (Eagleton 1983, p. 66). These questions put forward by Eagleton show that there is a greater possibility for subjective interpretation of any literary text, especially the interpretation other than the author intended to convey.

4. Analysis and Discussion

To reinforce the idea of totalitarian absurdity the following discussion has been brought into limelight.

4.1. Disharmony in the States and Revolt of Masses

Orwell's 1984 depicts the social and political atmosphere of the state as out of harmony. The *Party* strives hard to bring harmony into the affairs of the state but fails badly. The narrator

says, "The past was dead, the future was unimaginable" (p. 12). The authority is not able to bring order into the affairs of the state. It has changed the old order as past no more exists and the new order is not applicable. The development of the *Newspeak*, use of technology, installation of the telescreen, thought police and establishment of spying agencies though work but eventually they fail badly and can be reduced to an absurdity.

4.2. Failure of the Different Ministries

Orwell's 1984 depicts that the *Party* has made *Ministry of Love*. The ministry aims to refrain the inhabitants from any sexual and love relations. Marriage only means to deliver children for the good will of the *Party*. The said Ministry seems to be the most horrible as discussed by the writer. He says that there are no windows in the whole building. The streets of the Ministry were used to be guarded by the gorilla-faced guards wearing black uniform (p. 2). Analysis of the fiction shows that though the Ministry is very rigid about the implications of its laws but there are evidences which show that it fails badly and can be drawn to absurdity.

Winston and Julia develop a deep love relation. On the other hand, the *Party's* approach to sex instinct is clear. The narrator says, "The Party was trying to kill the sex instinct, or, if it could not be killed, then to distort it and dirty it" (p. 30). *Party* strives to either kill this instinct or to completely distort it, but the protagonist is not willing to accept this dream like world which is being constructed by *Big Brother* and his men. Besides his love affair he is reluctant to touch his wife, Kathrine but at the same times, the writer says, "And what he wanted, more even than to be loved, was to break down that wall of virtue, even if it were only once in his whole life" (p. 31). Later, he proves to be the villain who breaks this wall of virtue as he develops his relationship with Julia.

The *Party* struggles to vaporize the natural emotions of the masses for the strong establishment of the *Big Brother* as he forbids every kind of love affair, but it fails. Winston falls in love with Julia and the narrator says, "The relief of seeing her was so great that he could not resist staring directly at her for several seconds" (p. 51). He overlooks the rigidity and torture of the party for the sake of his love. It is not only that he falls in love rather, he asks her to meet him. Winston ask her, "where can we meet?" (p. 52) And she instantly replies, "Victory Square, near the monument" (p. 52). The narrator earlier has discussed that especially women's chastity was the loyalty to the party. (p. 30). Thus, it is not only Winston who overlooks the Party's rules for his love rather, Julia, who's chastity is the symbol of her loyalty even shows a revolt for the sake of her love. This strong bond of love between the two symbolizes the failure of the *Big Brother* as the ever-watching authority.

It is not only that they compromise the rules of the party rather, they engage in physical relation for so many times. Though *Party* is very firm about the sexual intercourse, but Winston and Julia know the hiding places. The party hopes that the telescreen has been installed everywhere and spies move around, but they do not know the hiding places. Julia tells Winston, "Not here,' she whispered back. 'Come back to the hide out. It's safer" (p. 58). Winston is not doing this for the first time rather, according to him he has done it for so many times. Thus, the supremacy of the *Party* and its impositions about the *Ministry of Love* seems to be vain as Winston and Julia are successful in their motives.

The *Party* has been very resolute about the supremacy of the *Big Brother*. The evaporation and to unperson an individual are the practice of the day. Winston who stands against the *Party* is

brought into the horrible room 101. Instantly, when he is told about the room, the writer says, "The expression on O'Brien's face did not change" (p. 125). The confidence of the man is because of his firmness as he is not ready to accept the supremacy of the Party. When Winston is brought into the room 101. He is tortured and he is faced with his phobia and then Goldstein makes him perceive the future of the *Party*. A kind of government based on the excessive use of power, oppression, and despotism. This will bring success to the party, "A world of victory after victory" (p. 129). This glorified and romantic version of the near future of the Party is denied by Winston.

Winston has counter argument with Goldstein. Winston, at one point, cannot identify the power which will bring destruction to the *Party* as he says, "I don't know I don't care. Somehow you will fail. Something will defeat you" (p. 129). The discussion shows that he is not ready to accept *Big Brother* by heart. On the other hand, the *Party* and its members consider themselves as the survivors as Goldstein says, "Your kind is extinct; we are the inheritors" (p. 130). Though Goldstein is quite narcissistic in his point of view but at the same he says, "If you are a man, Winston, you are the last man" (p. 130). On the other hand, Winston says, "Yes, I consider myself superior" (p. 130). It shows clearly that Winston is not bearable for Goldstein and his *Party* but at the same times he is the last hurdle regarding the complete control of the masses as he is determined to deny the supremacy of the *Big Brother*. The attitude and response of Winston can be considered is the archetype of his class. Hence, he is not the last person rather, there is whole class which stands against this kind of despotic inclinations.

The conversation going on between Winston and Goldstein aims to degrade each other. Goldstein tries to negate the very physical existence of Winston and to project the authority of *Big Brother*. But Winston is not ready to accept the evidences given by *Party* member. He asks Goldstein whether *Big Brother* existed at all and he replies, "Of course he exists" (p. 124). Thus, Goldstein is very practical about the existence of *Big Brother* but on practical grounds his approach is very nonsensical in nature.

On the other hand, Winston is very scientific in nature. He justifies his existence in scientific ways as he says, "...'You do not exist,' said O'Brien" (p. 124). The next reply that comes from Winston totally evaporates the authority of "Big Brother" and demonstrates his own physical body, "I think I exist,' he said wearily. 'I am conscious of my own identity. I was born and I shall die. I have arms and legs. I occupy a particular point in space. No other solid object can occupy the same point simultaneously" (p. 124). The arguments put forward by him are very practical in nature. Winston was born and will die, and he occupies a space as far as he is alive. On the other hand, *Big Brother* comes with in no span of time and he occupies no space except his portraits which are hinging everywhere. Thus, the personality of *Big Brother* can be reduced to absurdity while the protagonist prevails over everything. Briefly *Big Brother* is a myth while Winston is a tangible reality.

The *Party* strives to bring those people into the fold of the state who ever show any kind of revolt or to go against the norms of the *Party*. The installation of telescreen aims to catch those who are engaged in any kind of activity against the *Big Brother*. The telescreen seems to turn towards every direction a man turns to; but eventually it fails. The torturing of the masses is daily practice and spying and surveillance is extremely hard. These all efforts of the Party aim to make them according to the desires of the Party but, in real sense, they prove to be ineffectual. One such example is Winston. He is caught and punished severely. He is faced with his phobia. The reason behind this trouble is his engagement with all those activities which

have been forbidden by *Party* like, *Thought Crime*, sexual intercourse, and resistance to the impositions of the *Party*. The question which is of the significance is, though he is caught, punished, and tortured but whether he comes into the fold of the state? The answer to this question is, absolutely no.

Even during the days of his imprisonment Winston is not ready to accept the supremacy of Big Brother. He is reluctant to accept that even *Big Brother* existed, and he considers himself superior to him. When he is released from the room 101 and goes to the chestnut tree; there he meets Julia and she is quite optimistic regarding the future days of their love relation as she says, "They can't get inside you,' she had said" (p. 140). It means that though they can torture him, but the few cubic centimetres of his mind are himself and he can design any kind of plan that he wants.

Professor Kamen quotes in Spanish Inquisitor, "We must remember that main purpose of the trial and execution is not to save the soul of the accused but to achieve the public good and put fear into others" (Kamen, 1998). It is clear in the light of the reference that any autocrat would not work for the betterment of the state rather every kind of coercion level the revolts in the state to rule in unobstructed way. The selected narratives as well as the factual world both highlight such kind scenario where the rulers proved to be very despotic, but the statistics show that they fail eventually. In case of the selected works the *Big Brother* and *The Gate* proved to be ineffectual eventually as they cannot sustain themselves.

The efforts of the state prove to be ineffective. Winston has not come into the folds of the states up till now. He can very easily engage himself again with any kind of thought crime. He is determined to continue his love relation as he says to Julia, "We must meet again,' he said" (p. 141) and she replies to his question, "Yes, 'she said,' we must meet again." (p. 141). The conversation between the two signifies that the efforts of the Party and the torture in the horrible room 101 is absurd. The state fails to bring him into the fold of the state and he is determined more than ever to be engaged in such kind of activities which have been forbidden by *Big Brother* so that to rule in an unhindered way.

4.3. The States Fail to Stop the Revolts and Materialize the Policies despite the Wars

Totalitarian regimes are constantly in war either with in the state or beyond the boundaries of the state. These wars aim to resist to any revolt in the state or to stop any aggression of the foreign states or the war may aim to expand the boundaries of the state. Eflien wrote a report in 1992 under the title *A Case Study: Afghanistan; A Soviet Failure* which refers to the Amir of Afghanistan who said, "(t)he friendship of Afghanistan is of no service to Russia whatsoever, beyond allowing her to pass through the country to India, which means placing Afghanistan under the foot of Russia". This refers to the fact that Russian's penetration to Afghanistan aimed nothing else than expansion. However, the effort of the USSR led to fruitfulness as after a decade it turned back in the disintegrated form. Hence, these efforts can be reduced to illogicality.

Orwell's 1984 depicts the war like situation. It is beyond the understanding of the average person that why the wars are being waged and against whom. The protagonist says that he does not recall any period that Oceania has not been in war against any one state. The situation is further made confused by the fact when an average person like Winston cannot identify the state's enemy. At one occasion it is in war with Eurasia while at another moment it has an

alliance with Eurasia to fight against East Asia and vice versa. Thus, the wars are not being waged for any specific purpose nor they have any long-term agenda.

It is not only the matter that the mechanism of the wars is not understandable rather, the benefits and use of the war in the favour of the state is also of no significance. One can rightly gauge the fruitlessness of these skirmishes as Winston says, "If they could get control of the whole of Africa, if they had airfields and submarine bases at the Cape, it would cut Oceania in two. It might mean anything: defeat, breakdown, the redivision of the world" (p. 140). The description and analysis given by Winston is so horrible.

Clausewitz's *On War* highlights the real success of any ruler in terms of the stability and prosperity of the country. He is of the opinion that the original means of strategy is victory while victory can be analysed in terms of the peace which is sustained in the state. Marx looks at history as a continuous flux of war which is fought between the haves and the have's not. The current study also investigates this controversial issue in the selected narratives. The authorities in the states try to bring harmony and peace into the state, which is in real sense, a scarce commodity. As there is no peace in the states so one can rightly say that they fail badly. Hence, it can be rightly said that they are not victorious in the long run.

Oceania is striving for the expansion of the state to Africa. In such case Oceania needs high preparation for the war like submarine and huge army but even it would divide the state in two parts as both are not on the same plate of the earth. In another case he is of the opinion that the war may result the defeat and breakdown of Oceania. In either of the case Oceania is in loss. Thus, the hard struggle of the state of Oceania to expand its boundaries to Africa is nothing else than an absurd activity.

In this context the wars which have been waged by America can be exemplified. US attacks Afghanistan in the post 9/11 era to end the Talban's rule in the country. It has taken more than a decade. Washington Post published a report in August 2017 which highlighted that the basic purpose of Afghan was to train the local army to fight against the terrorist. The report says, "After 16 years, it's not surprising that many people think that strategy has failed". The information shared by the newspaper clearly shows that the penetration to foreign countries never bears any fruit.

4.4. The Failed States

Any state aims to bring security, prosperity, and harmony into the state. Orwell's 1984 depicts the state of Oceania which utterly fails about the availability of the necessities of the life and requirements of the state. The whole state of Oceania is insecure. The narrator says, "People disappeared everyday" (p. 48). It means that the state was no more a safe place for its own citizens. Furthermore, it is told by the writer that majority of the disappearances were suicide. People in Oceania would prefer to die than to live a life of such torture and suffocation. Hence, the whole essence of the state is nonsensical.

There is no symmetry and harmony in the state. The *Party* interferes with the data of the state. The narrator says, "This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound-tracks, cartoons, photographs to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any

political or ideological significance" (p. 18). The *Party* and its member would alter every fact which may go against the ideology of the *Big Brother*.

This alteration leads to a kind of disharmony in the affairs of the state. The facts and figures which are being shared are according to the writer's own making and nothing more than a fantasy, "Statistics were just as much a fantasy in their original version as in their rectified version" (p. 19). This fantasized version of the statistics leads to the uncertainty as the narrator says, "Everything melted into mist" (p. 17). The discussion elaborates that though the state is striving hard to bring a harmony into the affairs of the state so that to rule in an unimpeded way but in the long run it brings more uncertainty into the affairs of the state. Hence, it can be rightly said that the state is making an absurd effort to bring such a hostile mechanism into the affairs of the state. 1984 highlights the despotic tendencies of the state so that to overlook the will and wit of the masses. The installation of the telescreen, establishment of thought police, spying agencies and the terror of the black-moustached man all aim to impose the authority of the *Party*. All these efforts prove to be futile eventually. One such example is Winston who stands firm against them.

The selected narratives highlight the concerns of the states' authorities. They seem honest and devoted to the state, but they cannot meet the very essence of the state. Maurice Ayodele Coker refers to Owoye & Bissessar's Bad Governance and Corruption in Africa: Symptoms of Leadership and Institutional Failures (1992, p. 1) which describes, "It consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced, the capacity of government to effectively formulate and implement policies; and the respect of citizens and the state institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them". The opinion of these writers clearly shows that the authorities in both the states do not fulfil the basic criteria of the states.

4.5. State's Coercion and Optimism of the Masses

It is not only Winston who shows resistance to the authority but also, he seems optimistic about the whole middle class. At one occasion he says, "If there is hope, wrote Winston, it lies in the proles" (p. 32). The statement shows that though the *Party* has been adamant, stubborn, and firm about the impositions of the ideology but Winston like himself is much optimistic about the possible revolt on the part of the proles. One day, they may show severe response besides the harsh treatment of *Big Brother* and this revolt may prove devastating to the party. This devastation will reduce all the struggles of the party into absurdity.

It is clear in the light of the analysis of the selected narratives that there are instances that the authority may not cope with the revolts on the part of the masses. They always find a way to sneak of the state's folds. Lichbach's *Rationality and Society* (1994) develops an argument that, "...it is also true that history has indeed seen incidents in which a mass of individuals at least seems to have swept away regimes...". Thus, the case of Winston and Yahya's operation can be exemplified in this context as they are successful in their designed plans and the absolute governments fail in both the cases.

5. Conclusion

The discussion above highlights the ineffectual tendencies of the totalitarian regimes in the states. These authorities are always rigid in the imposition of their ideologies and employ every

technique to suppress the masses but there is always a silver line in the clouds. The middleclass men always try to redefine themselves and try to shatter the blocks of fear of these regimes into pieces which aim to dominate the state. The selected narrative depicts such tyrannical exertions of the totalitarian regimes but a reading in between the lines shows that to rule in an unimpeded way is mere a fantasy. The rulers struggle hard to suppress the masses but eventually the whole drama can be reduced into absurdity.

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