

OBJECTIFICATION, A CASE OF SOCIAL ACCORD AGAINST DYSTOPIAN AGONY AS IN GEORGE ORWELL'S 1984 AND SUZANNE COLLINS'S *THE HUNGER GAMES*

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Received: 23 Mar 2018

Accepted: 02 Apr 2018

Published: 10 Apr 2018

ABSTRACT

Objectification is unacceptable in any civilized human society, in fact the modern society encourages the dictum of individuals and focus on individual rights against collective will fast overruling the subjectivity of the human race. But the present study elucidates a disturbing discovery of the pathetic nature of man observed from the analysis of George Orwell's 1984 and Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games challenging the ambitious narrative of the individual. Dystopian authors play the significant role of forecasters who warn on the destructive tendencies in the society to realize and adopt emergency remedial measures upon prevailing sociopolitical cynicism in society but their act of cautioning also falls under the critical suspicion of subjectivity. Moreover, this study focuses on relating the probing case of man's objectification as pervasive for his harmonious social existence contributing order and stability in society.

KEYWORDS: *Objectification, Individual, Dystopia, Sociopolitical, Subjectivity*

INTRODUCTION

The dictum of sociology on the differentiation of individualism and collectivism is quite contradictory in a dystopian perspective. Individualism defines individual as an independent entity of the human society, thinking on its own, taking decisions and being responsible for it; while in collectivism the individual is bound by the thinking of the various influential groups and are forced to get along. However, the critical reading of dystopian novels draws attention to a different perceptive with regard to the real nature of individual and existence of individualism. This philosophical inquiry is the very purpose of the dystopian protagonists who undertake a journey of finding one's self and true nature of existence against a state of oppression and humiliation at the hands of the totalitarian regimes.

Dystopian novels, always set in the future warns against the horrors of totalitarianism, conditioning, manipulation, oppression, and the various socio-political ideologies that pave way for the victimization of masses; the warning stems from the fear of the present rightly poised for a bleak future. The dystopian authors lament the plight of the individual who is mostly ignorant of the scope of individual rights and is lost in the social rituals which are assimilated as habits, to form the very persona. The compromises one willingly makes, in the words of a dystopian author, is the passive existence of humans manipulated or conditioned by the totalitarian forces.

The present study looks at the nature of collectivism and individualism on account of two selected dystopian novels, George Orwell's 1984 and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* to understand and relate the scope of individuality in a rather collective world. The philosophical theories put forward by Louis Althusser on "Ideology",

“Individuality”, and “Ideological State Apparatuses” aids in substantiating the research problem. A study of these two dystopian novels and the philosophical theories would help in identifying the relevance of the existing notions on the paradigm of individuality and thereby facilitate in shaping a radical judgment on the fragile nature of the existing ideology.

Political Dystopia in *1984*

George Orwell's *1984* is a chilling account of political despair that frustrated him throughout his life and career. Born in British India, he started his career as an officer of the Imperial Police in Burma where he had a dilemma over the superiority of his race maintained against the plight of the natives and the blind indoctrination of the populace who themselves justify the coming of British as for their good. Orwell always had this struggle of righteousness which he couldn't easily solve and was a lifetime chase for ideological stability precipitated through his writings speaking volumes on the individual crisis which he identified as of the whole humanity. The Spanish civil war and the related political treachery also left him socially and politically betrayed, though he was ignorant about the larger political conflicts of powerful nations involved in it. Orwell once wrote in his essay *Why I Write* that “every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written ... *against* totalitarianism and for democratic socialism” (Orwell, *Why I Write* p.6). He was basically a humanist also, as identified from the narratives of his fictional and non-fictional works.

1984 published in 1949 draws the picture of a post-apocalyptic England, “Airstrip One” where the citizens are subjected to atrocities of the state. The posters reading “Big Brother is Watching You” (Orwell, *1984*, p.3) assures that the citizens are under his mighty care however reminding the constant surveillance for which the “telescreen” is in place. This dual essence is there with the ideology of the four ministries of the State Oceania; the slogans of the Party; the rituals; and other ideological institutions. “The Ministry of Truth, which concerned itself with news, entertainment, education and fine arts” is concerned mainly at rewriting history, where Winston Smith, the dystopian hero works, the Ministry is primarily focused on the creation of a new language “Newspeak”, aimed at minimizing the use of words and thereby lifting the significance of language itself. Education is in line with the requirements of the Party, where children are taught to spy on people including their parents. “The Ministry of Peace”, is concerned about war. “The Ministry of Love, maintained law and order” and the Ministry of Plenty was responsible for economic affairs” where thriftiness was advised “and made sure about the rationing of essentials” (Orwell, *1984*, p.6).

Winston knows that everything is wrong and life can certainly be better, but his likes who realize the real state of events are a few. The majority population are the “Proles” who are living in blissful ignorance, poverty and suppression, the government of Oceania, one of the three provinces of Airstrip One providing them cheap entertainment, have let them almost free, certainly at times make them aware the horrors of the war the state is defending by occasional droppings of bombs and havoc; the droppings obviously in the pretension of enemy. Orwell pities this condition of the Proles, “The masses never revolt of their own accord, and they never revolt merely because they are oppressed” (Orwell, *1984*, p.216). The proletarians, “Left to themselves, they will continue from generation to generation and from century to century, working, breeding and dying, not only without any impulse to rebel, but without the power of grasping that the world could be better than this” (Orwell, *1984*, p.219). Most of the Outer Party members, the next sizeable population, are just like Mr. Parsons who upon his punishment in Ministry of Love for “thought crime” where he was betrayed by his little daughter for saying “Down with Big Brother” in his sleep is remorseful “Yes I said that! Said it over and over again... Do you know what I am going to say to them when I go up before the tribunal? ‘Thank You, I’m going to say, ‘thank you for

saving me before it was too late"; moreover Mr. Parsons is proud of his daughter, her action shows that the father has "brought her up in the right spirit" (Orwell, 1984, p.245)

And then there are people like Syme who openly criticize the Party to "vapourise" one fine morning and to be declared an "unperson", one who never existed. In 1984 Winston one of the freethinking men like Syme in Oceania dare writing a diary of his thoughts, very much like Orwell who was writing an account against totalitarian tendencies in world politics in the first half of twentieth century. The masters of Oceania are the inner party members like O'Brien, who rule Oceania in the name of Big Brother. The Inner Party members are "held together" by the adherence to a common doctrine" (Orwell, 1984, p.217), who are insane about the doctrine and oppress others to follow it because the reasoning capacity and logic of the inner party member is confined merely to the doctrine. The ideology of the Party put forward by O'Brien in his dialogue with Winston in the Ministry of Love are utterances of deep ideological indoctrination where the person on the other side, the sane, wonders how to convince this lunatic who poses as equally reasonable. O'Brien preaches Winston on "reality": "Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else. Not in the individual mind that can make mistakes, and in any case soon perishes: only in the mind of the Party, which is collective and immortal"(Orwell, 1984, p.261). Orwell's panic on collectivism is apparent throughout the novel and surfaces as party opinions in the conversation between O'Brien and Winston: "The first thing you must realise is that power is collective. The individual has power in so far as he ceases to be an individual. You know the Party slogan: 'Freedom is Slavery'." (Orwell, 1984, p. 276-77)

The Hunger Games, A Young Adult Dystopian Fiction

Suzanne Collins, the daughter of a Vietnam War veteran started her career as children's writer, later once she switched to serious writing through *The Hunger Games*, popularized as a new type of novel belonging to the "Young Adult Dystopian Fiction", the author easily assimilated the trend to follow with two more books to the series to make it a trilogy. The victimization of Katniss, the main character in the novel and the author, Suzanne Collins expose two related dystopian settings, one real and the other imaginary.

In the "Reaping" for Hunger Games, Katniss volunteers herself as a tribute replacing her younger sister, Prim. Reaping is "both a time for repentance and a time for thanks", 'repentance' for the uprising of the districts against Capitol, seventy five years ago, and 'thanks' for the lives spared to suffer in hunger and horror of the games". (Collins, *The Hunger Games*, p.19) Katniss is soon alienated from her people and life of District 12, now she is a tribute in the Games, she acquires a new identity, a challenge for which one derives untapped energy, enthusiasm and strategies. Katniss's individuality and personal disposition shifts from one to another; from that of a poor subject in District 12 to an important pawn of the Capitol in the Games and a strong contender of the district to bring riches to meet the appetite of its people.

The Games in the novel is a fictitious version of modern day television reality games just like the "Survivor" a U S series in CBS; but coupled with inspiration from Roman Gladiator Games and the Greek myth of Minotaur and Theseus. From the myth Collins draws the theme of individual will compromised for the collective will of the society, where the tributes are forced to participate or the districts are forced to send their young ones for their sustenance, through the ritualistic lottery practice inspired from Shirley Jackson's short story, "The Lottery". From the Roman

Gladiator Games Collins drew the archetypal search for man to indulge in deadly adventurous games which have a so-called civilized form in the modern day reality shows, the author is awestruck, realizing the negligible differences it make.

Neither the Capitol people nor those in the districts have any scope of free thinking; their individuality and self esteem seldom get a chance to evolve. The plight of the districts is survival, they just want to fulfill their basic need, and are incapable of any agitation against the Capitol. The Capitol people live a life of “distractions” through entertainment, often undergoing cosmetic surgeries for appearance and are victims of “Capitol life” impassive to the predicament and killings of the tributes, in fact they look forward to the annual entertainment just like the Romans awaited and cheered the Gladiator Games. Both in the Capitol and the districts people take the Games as normal not thinking about any possible alternative ways of life and existence. It is when she volunteers herself as a tribute that Katniss applies some reasonable thinking about the possible changes that can be brought to the life of her likes. She then takes up an individual rebellion against the Capitol just like Thesues who decided to put an end to the annual sacrifice to Minotaur.

Objectification

It shall be a common understanding that generally every human considers other humans as objects unless something is required from these “objects”, the “other”. This is how the inner party members like O’Brien considers the outer party members like Winston and Syme; and interestingly both inner party and outer party members find the Proles as objects, a large number of people living an animalistic life. This has no difference in *The Hunger Games* also, the people of the Capitol consider the inhabitants of the districts as objects, and in the perspective of people in the districts the Capitol citizens watching the Games are objects impassive to a brutal torture of their likes. The “objects” turn out to be “subjects” when they endorse an ideology; in *1984* Winston is realized as a subject of the ideology put forward by the revolutionary leader, Emmanuel Goldstein when he recounts his review of Goldstein’s book, “The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism:

The book fascinated him, or more exactly it reassured him... It said what he would have said, if it had been possible for him to set his scattered thoughts in order. It was the product of a mind similar to his own, but enormously more powerful, more systematic, less fear-ridden. The best books, he perceived, are those that tell you what you know already. (Orwell, *1984*, p.208)

Interestingly this is the right example of an object’s transition, transformation and identification in to a subject best explained by Orwell in his novel. An object goes through experiences from his premises to assimilate certain ideologies to identify his new form of subjectivity, one could have been an object or subject before which depends on the social, economic, political, cultural, religious, regional, physical, psychological and similar backgrounds he belong to. It is then Winston realizes and dares to write in his diary the dual stand of the Party which is in fact for the suppression of all its members including the likes of O’Brien through ideological indoctrination. He shockingly identifies the terrible nature of objectification of the masses in Oceania to the collective personae and psyche. The realization the book of Goldstein provides is a realisation of liberal life, a warless world, which promise more food, provision for state permitted sex and scope for self-development and content of life.

The case of Katniss Everdeen also is not different, she and the people of the poor districts live a primitive life, hunting for food, bartering the hunt for other essentials which nature hasn't got in readiness. It is when she is dragged into the scene of "Hunger Games" she identifies her objectification by the Capitol, realizing her as a bet of the districts and a pawn set by the Capitol in the Games. But she continues to be an object in the hands of the Capitol when she is proud about her appearances and the impact she has made on the audience as a strong contender. She along with Peeta slowly challenges the Capitol through their actions but of course sustaining the scope of entertainment, of heroism and a newfound passionate love. But *The Hunger Games* trilogy also goes from one form of subjectivity to another where President Snow of the Capitol is replaced by a new ruler, the majority of the population is kept in darkness upon the realities on political shifts and bombings; Katniss is leading the revolution, she is the "face" of revolution, once again a pawn, now of the revolutionaries, shifting between an object and a subject or from one form of subjectivity to another. The case of Suzanne Collins also is similar, when she is a mere object in the hands of her motivators, proven from the fact that she acknowledges her as a writer for Young Adults, and bringing the serials to form a trilogy, more for entertainment than for information and empowerment against ideological indoctrination.

Now let's analyse and evaluate how the status of being an "object" is differentiated from being a "subject". "Object" and "Subject" are two different perspectives of the same existence. Every human considers "the other" as an "object" till the object is required for something. For example, the common man consider prisoners as mere objects, when they complain that the government is unnecessarily spending so much money on them facilitating them with shelter, food, counseling etc and making them live better (all out of our money). Parents consider children as objects for the accomplishment of their aspirations and dreams; man consider woman as an object, full of life, while seeking sexual pleasure. Objectification of woman has been widely discussed but the present study proposes to widen that spectrum of application of the theory of objectification. Taking the case of children, they are trained and conditioned by parents, teachers, elders, institutions and society at large, by way of rituals, practices and notions that are habituated and make the personae. Every person identifies his self as derived from these habituated practices.

Religion can be taken as one of the most apparent institution in history that habituate, make human subjects of the religious ideologies to lead a set way of life. A third person perspective of an atheist or an antagonist or even a subject of another religion may find the devotees who observe bizarre practices of a particular religion as objects while the person who follows them find themselves as subjects of the ideology and those who are champion practitioners are original subjects who make sure of the allegiance of the other subjects, and the subjects who once in a while become over conscious of their own practices and find themselves alienated from "real nature of reality" consider themselves as individuals, like Winston Smith and George Orwell who realize there could be better ways of life but what and how is unknown. One human considers "the other" or the "object" as a "subject" when he really wants something from him to follow his ideology of one nature or another. Literally man cannot help himself from becoming a subject unless he became conscious of his real nature of existence and the bitter reality of habituation which seldom people attain and adhere to, however the realization can only facilitate a detached life in a collective world, which shall provide fulfillment for the person and suspicion for others.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study discloses the curious case of social accord against dystopian agony. The dystopian authors lament the oppression of individuals at the hands of totalitarian authorities and they cry for free will and right to expression for individuals. But what will happen if everyone has the right to have free will and free expression, then humans shall need their own territory, then to whom shall they express, so society is inevitable, obviously man is a social animal, a society will be of total chaos if it is of free individuals, so there is regulation for harmony, then raises the question of rights and equality; inevitably authority is needed to implement these, the authority prefers hierarchy for social order; and hierarchical practices and ideological indoctrinations of various institutions established by the authorities for practice and execution of power facilitates objectification in the long run. Social accord or social harmony is inevitable for the sustenance of human society, so totalitarianism might surface occasionally when a society is going through deep political trouble or when there is a political disillusionment or sectarian tensions threatening to lead to more complications. These are the times when some kind of a new ideology which is best expected to solve the problems evolves to bring social order. History stands witness of such evolutions of ideology which bring more harm than good.

To summarize, dystopia is essential for social order, without social order the world won't be a happy, secure place to belong to. So what is a man's requirement for utopia, it could be a dream where the elements of oppression are minimal, however any "individual", if any, would find utopia also as a dystopia with too many rules to observe to lead a monotonous uniform life amidst a possibility of vast diversity; though it would be fine for the "subjects". Life can only be beautiful if there is diversity in existence and these diversities when turn out to be oppression, exploitation and manipulation of "the other" can lead to dystopia; unhappy and unsafe nature of existence. Social agreement of certain laws is inevitable in any society for harmonious existence; so the hope can be in a diverse society with less dystopian elements which facilitates better scope for humanism.

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