Chapter - I

BETWEEN THE PRIEST AND THE COMMISSAR
Orwell's literary career can be conveniently divided into two clear-cut phases. The first phase that commences with Orwell's resignation from the Imperial Indian Police Service in 1927 continues till 1936 when he leaves on a commissioned tour across the Industrial North of England, eventually leading to The Road to Wigan Pier. Whereas, the second phase that begins in 1937 with Orwell's joining the Spanish Civil War continues till the fag end of his life and sees him through his work Nineteen Eighty-Four.

The present study of George Orwell is based on the proposition that the Spanish Civil War was a significant and a decisive event in Orwell's life and writings. It brought about a revolutionary change in his fundamental approach to life, society and polity which, in turn, set in wide-ranging changes in the literary perspective in his later writings such as, Homage to Catalonia, Coming Up for Air, Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four besides the polemics.

Orwell's later or the post-Spanish Civil War writings as I would prefer to call them hereafter, show a remarkable change in their theme and style when compared with his pre-Spanish Civil War writings. As Orwell himself affirms: "Possibly it was the turning of the tide" (HC, 48). Herbert Matthews believes that Orwell's Spanish Civil War experience was the "turning point in his life" (Critical Heritage, 144). Further, Orwell acknowledges the role and significance of the Spanish Civil War in his liter-
ary career in very clear and unambiguous terms: "The Spanish Civil War and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood." (CEJLS: I, 28)

The pre-Spanish Civil War writings of Orwell, as it were, are marked by a narrowness of vision, vagueness, confusion and a perceptible want of conviction. Besides, the whole body of writing that comprises three full-length novels, one memoir and documentary are essentially a medley of autobiography, fiction and documentary. This trend, as such, continues unabated till as late as 1937 when Orwell enrolls himself as a volunteer in one of the Republican Spanish militias "to fight against Fascism". (HC, 46)

Orwell was in Spain for about six months only and his stay was not marked by any spectacular achievement either. As he writes to a friend soon after his return from Spain: "We started off by being heroic defenders of democracy and ended by slipping over the border with police panting on our heels." (CEJLS: I, 311)

But this is only one side of the story. The other side, which in fact we are more concerned with, is that the Spanish Civil War experience apparently ineffectual though, worked a miracle in Orwell's life. It brought about a transformation in his mind and writings, which precisely is the main object of this study and the central argument of this thesis.

The major clue to this survey, as such, comes directly from the changing response of Orwell to the plight of the individual
with a corresponding change in theme and technique of his writings commencing with his exposure to the Spanish Civil War. This, again, is naturally connected with the issue of politics inevitably, as man's fate has been decided by politics since time immemorial.

A study of Orwell's career as a writer shows that it was a continuous search for meaning and truth in the sort of life the modern man is condemned to. In his writings, therefore, humanity gets priority over any other literary or aesthetic consideration. Orwell's search, however, finally bears fruit in the course of his Spanish Civil War experience when he suddenly finds himself mature and acquires a clear perspective by way of a profound political conviction, an 'enlightenment' which he was looking forward to all his life.

Thus, Orwell's evolution as a writer shows his continual attempt at fusing the "Political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole," which finally materializes through his exposure to the Spanish Civil War atmosphere. (CEJLS: I, 29) Hence the event is so remarkable, so significant.

Presently Orwell, greatly enlightened by the new perspective, surveys his earlier writings thus:

And looking back through my work, I see that it is invariably where I lacked a political purpose that I wrote lifeless books and was betrayed into purple passages... and humbug generally. (CEJLS: I, 30)

Orwell thus nearly dismisses his pre-Spanish Civil War
writings as "humbug generally". And their limitation, as he himself points out, was precisely the lack of a "political purpose".

For a better understanding of Orwell's mind and art, it is therefore necessary to trace the evolution of his political ideas that finally matures into a conviction during the Spanish Civil War and acts as a powerful catalytic agent to hasten the process that leads to his creative renascence, as manifested in the merit and success of Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four, the two acknowledged works of outstanding stature of this century.

Thus, as the first flash of Orwell's new political conviction gets reflected in Homage to Catalonia, this discussion necessitates a greater attention on the political aspect of the text, as a precursor of the two later classics Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four. But before that it is obligatory, in the interest of the thesis, to give a cursory glance through the earlier writings of Orwell in order to show the contrast and to bring the proposed argument into right focus.

-II-

To trace the very root of Orwell's political consciousness one has to examine carefully his childhood experience at home and at the snobbish Residential School, St. Cyprians'. As Orwell himself traces back the origin of his class consciousness and
snobbishness and his obsession with poverty: "I was born into what you might describe as the lower-unner-middle class" (RWP, 108). Almost as an inalienable part of the typical middle-class upbringing he grew up with a strong sense of class-consciousness and poverty:

In the kind of shabby-genteel family that I am talking about there is far more consciousness of poverty than in any working class family... Rent and clothes and school bills are an unending nightmare, and every luxury, even a glass of beer, is an unwarrantable extravagance. (RWP, 112)

Thus, this very fact that Orwell was born into a 'lower-upper-middle class' family, left an enduring impression on his mind and personality. It was so because the middle class families in England suffered perennially from multiple complexes; for their income and social standing were ever trailing behind their expectation. Besides their terrible inferiority complex and their craving for money and favor they had the detestable snobbishness towards the lower and the working class. As Orwell later sadly recollects: "I was forbidden to play with the plumber's children; they were 'common' and I was told to keep away from them" (RWP, 110). With a deep sense of loss and regret Orwell recalls further: "So, very early, the working class ceased to be a race of friendly and wonderful beings and became a race of enemies." (RWP, 110)

The misgivings and prejudice against the 'common' and the
'Working class' that was instilled into the tender mind of Orwell as a child persisted with him till late into his life. In spite of his best efforts, he just could not shake that off. As Orwell vividly remembers; he was told many a time that "the lower classes smell". (RWP, 112)

Orwell's initiation into the middle class ethics starts from his own home though, it was deeply reinforced in his mind at the St. Cyprians', where he spent the most valuable and formative period of his life. As a matter of fact, the school which was quite expensive as such, chose Orwell on the basis of some scholarship which they obviously offer to attract meritorious boys from the lower income group. And soon Orwell realized the motive of their apparent charity that he was supposed to work hard and to fetch some rank and reputation for the school at the end. In fact, Orwell had to pay a very heavy price in return for this charity, which continued to claim its toll far late into his middle age.

As Orwell vividly records his hard time at the St. Cyprians', it was a real nightmarish experience for any child of eight or nine. His days in the school were simply a long smell of horror and atrocity that left its enduring marks in his formative mind and eventually turned it complex and melancholic. Particularly, the acute discrimination between the rich and the poor, depending on the parents' income, the continual encroachment of the school Headmaster of the school on young Orwell's self-respect and dignity, caused irreparable damage to his personality and clouded his later years with complexity.
Orwell, who was scarcely in his adolescence then, clearly remembers how he felt greatly sensitive to his position in the school. Every new wound caused by the latest insult only made him more sensitive to the damned bounty he was on:

> It was on these terms that I was at the St.Cyprians' myself: Otherwise my parents couldn't have afforded to send me to so expensive a school. (CEJLS:IV,336)

Such experiences gnawed into the softest tissues of his mind and personality. And quite naturally, when Orwell grew up there evolved a mind which was pessimistic, cynical and complex that greatly affected his approach to life. Orwell grew up as a resentful, introverted, withdrawing, solitary soul who was critical of almost everything. Besides, during his early phase of writing he could not think beyond the issue of poverty and economic disparity which he thought as the only possible violation of human decency.

Added to such unsavory circumstances in the School, Orwell's health too was yet another factor that greatly cramped his mind. He had chronic bronchitis, with a continually running nose and frequent bouts of whizzing. Moreover, the Headmaster would add salt to injury by saying that his cold was due to 'too much of eating' and, as usual, snub him in public.

Such hostile, unfortunate circumstances in his early life left a lasting mark on his mind and personality which prolonged, till Orwell went into the Spanish Civil War.
About the deep-rooted snobbery and complexity that developed as a part of his personality and mental frame-work, Orwell writes:

Take away God, Latin, the cane, class distinctions and sexual taboos, and the fear, the hatred, the snobbery and the misunderstanding might still all be there. (CEJLs:IV,368)

The impression was so deep and bold that it continued to cramp his ideas and visions till as late as 1936-37 when he finally succeeded in shaking it off, along with his new-found faith in Communism during the Spanish Civil War.

Thus, Orwell's complicated social and political vision was rooted in his childhood. When he left school and got into the practical life, he only knew the horrible blotches of such sicknesses without having the least idea of the remedy. And he subconsciously struggled for it till at last the Spanish Civil War offered him one.

After the ordeals at St.Cyprians' and a brief, uneventful period at Eton, Orwell got into the Imperial Indian Police and was posted as the sub-divisional police officer in Burma. He served in the police for five years until very rightly, rather timely he realized that he was not the man for the job and resigned from his service in 1927. The cause of his resignation, as Orwell himself admits, was his strong disaffection for the immoral Imperialism. And explaining further why he quit his job Orwell writes: "I felt I had got to escape not merely from Imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man" (RWP, 130)

During his brief service period in the Indian Police, two
particular events embittered his mind against the Colonial Government and hastened his determination to break off with the system. Orwell puts his own experience into the two stories on the Burmese background, which he wrote long after he had left Burma. They are: "A Hanging" (1931), and "Shooting an Elephant" (1936). (CEJLS: Vol. I)

"A Hanging" is the reconstruction of an incident of the execution of an Indian worker in one of the prisons in Burma where Orwell had to be present officially. That incident had a tremendous impact on his mind which continued to trouble him for a long time. As Jeffrey Meyers looks at it: "The early essay "A Hanging" (1931), his first treatment of the Colonial theme, is a paradigm of his guilt and responsibility." (Reader's Guide, 65). As Woodcock believes, it "was one of the crucial events in Orwell's Burmese days" (66). And Woodcock further reports that Orwell told somewhere on this with a deep sense of guilt: "I watched a man hanged once. It seemed to me worse than a thousand murders." (66). Orwell's reaction comes out clearly in the story:

> It is curious, but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man. When I saw the prisoner step aside to avoid the puddle I saw the mystery, the unspeakable wrongness, of cutting a life short when it is in full tide. (CEJLS: I, 68)

The case of the hanging embittered Orwell's feelings towards imperialism still further and made his continuance in the police service more or less unbearable.
Again Orwell brings out another incident in his story "Shooting an Elephant" which he wrote in 1936, ten years after he had left Burma. It is yet another vivid recollection of one of his bitter realizations of the hypocrisy, double-dealings and above all, the wide gulf between the natives and the agents of the immoral British Colonial set up. In Burmese Days, the first novel of Orwell which he had written several years before, there is a reference to this incident when the protagonist, John Flory relates to Elizabeth "the murder of an elephant which he had perpetrated some years earlier." (BD,'85)

The event as such was quite simple. An elephant in its cyclical 'must' goes on a rampage and as the police chief of the area, Orwell is called to tackle the situation. When he reaches the spot he finds that a coolie was already trampled to death, but the elephant had come back to normal, with the passing of the 'must' as usual. Though Orwell feels completely certain that the elephant wouldn't be a threat any more, he is forced to kill it. And it was precisely because he had to protect the image and the prestige of an English man and a police officer, though he experienced the bitter pangs of the scruples inside.

Orwell recalls his terrible moments of conflict and utter helplessness in that situation:

And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the whiteman's dominion in the East... but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of
those yellow faces behind. I perceived at this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. (CEJLS:1,269)

This realization, undoubtedly, acts as one of the decisive factors in prompting Orwell to resign from service. As George Woodcock argues, Orwell quit his job in the imperial Police in Burma in 1927 fully determined "to rebel against his own class and its view of the world and man's duties within it." (63)

These two events that Orwell develops later into stories were not the lone cases. They were in fact from among the numerous undesirable experiences Orwell had during his five year service as a Police Officer in a colonial regime. Hence Orwell left the job primarily to avoid his share in the guilt associated with the immoral colonial British rule in India. As Orwell writes: "I was conscious of an immense guilt that I had got to expiate". (RWP, 130)

This statement of Orwell clearly explains the reason behind his immediate act of renunciation to a life of 'down and out' as his memoir Down and Out in Paris and London vividly records.

As the course of Orwell's life indicates, soon after his resignation from the police service in India he plunged headlong into the slums of Paris and London and courted a life of misery, starvation and hardship. This act, which Orwell voluntarily undertook and sustained over an extended period of long eighteen months in the face of untold suffering and poverty, involved two clear objectives. Firstly, as Orwell himself acknowledges above,
it was an attempt at undoing or expiating the guilt he must have inevitably shared by associating himself directly with the British Raj in India.

The second which was more important and had a lifelong implication was his commitment to identify himself with the hungry, struggling millions of underdogs who were violently separated from him since his very childhood for his middle class legacy. (CEJLS, II)

Just as the two stories ("A Hanging" and "Shooting an Elephant") and the novel Burmese Days bear testimony to Orwell's anti-Imperialism, the memoir Down and Out in Paris and London shows Orwell's sincere efforts to pull down the age-old barrier between the working class and the snobbish English middle class. A close look at this book would certainly provide new clues to a better understanding of the writer's mind and art.

However, from our discussion so far, one thing emerges quite clear that from the very beginning Orwell shows an unusual concern for the suffering humanity and a keenness to dissolve all man-made inequality and injustice. But the fact remains that with the Spanish Civil War experience, Orwell's vision widens from the narrow biological concern to a broad universal one, based on higher human values.

-III-

The memoir Down and Out in Paris and London begins with the epigraph adopted from Chaucer, which itself sets the very tone of
the book and amply suggests the theme:

"O scathful harm, condition of povertel"

Thus begins the book, the first major publication of the writer, which clearly looks forward to the theme and temper of the three subsequent novels Orwell wrote before the Spanish Civil War. Thus in the three pre-Spanish Civil War novels and the memoir, poverty continues to be the leitmotif all through.

In the course of his nightmarish journey through the slums in Paris and London as a dishwasher, and a tramp; Orwell got a first hand experience of the dehumanizing effect of poverty and starvation. As he makes his objective clear: "Poverty is what I am writing about". (DOPL,9)

The impressions that went deep into Orwell's mind since his early childhood in the middle class surroundings sat heavy on his mind and did not allow him to see beyond. It was his belief that poverty is possibly the most flagrant violation of human decency or human rights and that it is the root cause of all evils. It reduces man to a brute, to an insensitive organic substance. As he writes:

You discover that a man who has gone even a week on bread and mangarine is not a man any longer, only a belly with a few accessory organs. (DOPL,19)

Elsewhere he says:

"Hunger reduces one to an utterly spineless, brainless condition". (DOPL, 38 )
Thus what Orwell precisely contends is that there is nothing more precious than food, nothing more detestable than poverty. It is this biological need that can reduce a man to a brute, sap away his morality, blast his faith and decency.

And finally, Orwell concludes the memoir of his precious days of great austerity and renunciation with a renewed commitment: "That is the beginning". (DOPL, 213) And thus ends the book.

What is this beginning then? What could it be?

The "beginning" that Orwell thus hints at, could possibly be the beginning of his growing concern for the human tragedy which he experienced directly during his days as a 'down and out'. Secondly, it could also be the beginning of his social and political awareness that finally reached a point of climax during the Spanish Civil War and was perpetuated in the later works, such as, Homage to Catalonia, Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four.

-IV-

The Burmese Days that followed Down and Out in Paris and London was Orwell's first novel. Its locale and the story are set in Burma and many of Orwell's first hand experiences as a Police Officer in Burma obviously mark the Novel.

The protagonist of the novel, John Flory is an English
timber merchant in Burma who commits suicide when he is scandalized and finally exposed by his Burmese mistress in a Sunday gathering of the Church.

The Burmese mistress feels terribly aggrieved when she sees Flory's growing affair with the newly arrived English girl, Elizabeth. She feels all the more intimidated when she visualizes with horror the possible culmination of their affair into marriage, inevitably leading to her desertion by Flory and her misery thereafter. Hence, of all the motives such as: jealousy, hatred or anger, it is her horror at the dreadful prospect of poverty that provokes the native girl to such a desperate act which eventually leads the plot to a tragic end. Again, the fact cannot be ruled out that the English merchant Flory could exploit the poor Burmese girl and enjoy her as his mistress primarily on account of her economic insecurity. This book, for its Burmese backdrop, could well be grouped together with the two stories "A Hanging" and "Shooting an Elephant". They further share one more thing in common as Orwell wrote all these in retrospect. However, the case of Burmese Days is different. It is neither exactly autobiographical nor entirely anti-imperialistic in theme and tone as the stories are.

The novel, continues the theme of poverty as its primary motif, thus subscribing to the basic thematic pattern of the Pre-Spanish Civil War works of Orwell.

It is imperative to take due note of the anachronism that partially eclipses the main motif in Burmese Days. In fact, it is
the only reasonable justification for the loss of focus in the novel on the central motif which runs through all the pre-Spanish Civil War works of the writer.

While the Critics are mostly on a consensus that Burmese Days marks the anti-imperialist phase of Orwell basically; my contention is that; Orwell does not go back upon his main motif of poverty at any point before the Spanish Civil War. It was rather, as I strongly believe, a temporary loss of focus which mainly arose due to the anachronism, that surfaces at two levels.

Firstly, after resigning from the Imperial Indian Police in Burma, Orwell immediately renounced himself to the slums of Paris and London and continued, as such, a long period of eighteen months. Again, when he got out, his first priority went to his memoir Down and Out in Paris and London in which he gives out his invaluable experience with the dregs of the society.

But, we may recall that the initial motivation that prompted Orwell to take on such course came from his experience in Burma.

Secondly, the same Burmese experience that made Orwell realize the futility of power and set him on an extended phase of renunciation leading eventually to the memoir Down and Out in Paris and London was again the basis of the novel Burmese Days. But Orwell seems to have withheld the urge for the novel to write down the memoir before the impressions fade out. Thus, the theme of poverty that Orwell so effectively brings out in the memoir DOPL does not feature prominently in Burmese Days.
If one pursues Orwell's writings chronologically, one will certainly find Burmese Days anachronistic for the above reasons.

Poverty, as the central concern through all the pre-Spanish Civil War writings of Orwell gets somewhat diffused in Burmese Days. Another possible explanation could be that, as long as Orwell was in Burma, he had not seen poverty in such nakedness as he came across in Paris and London. Orwell himself attests this fact in Down and Out in Paris and London that he had his first contact with poverty in the slums of Paris and London (DOPL, 9). Hence the anachronism.

But, in any case, the fact cannot be dismissed that Orwell was strongly obsessed with the theme of "poverty" and failed to stretch his imagination beyond, till the Spanish Civil War gave him a sudden jerk, bringing an abrupt termination of the trend. And Burmese Days certainly does not fall out of the trend that marks so clearly the pre-Spanish Civil War writings of Orwell.

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A Clergy Man's Daughter, Orwell's second novel that came out in 1935, just a year after Burmese Days, was not a success at all. In fact, this book was the most adversely criticized of all the books of Orwell. While Frank Wadsworth calls it Orwell's "Poorest novel" (97) and John Atkins dismisses it as a "hotchpotch" (84), the otherwise sympathetic Laurence Brander too finds it a 'failure' (92). The main faults of the novel, as Jeffrey Meyers points out was "its weak structure and unconvincing plot"
Reader's Guide, 80) when Robert A. Lee attributes it to its 
"documentary interpolations and its episodic structure" (23). This 
book, as it were, is generally treated as the weakest of all 
the novels by the writer. Orwell himself acknowledges this fact. 
(CEJLs: I, 165)

However, on the other hand, some critics still find the book 
not so discouraging. According to Quennel (195) 'a good deal of 
the writing' of this novel is "uncommonly forceful" (Critical 
Heritage, 61) while another critic finds it "a work of consid­
erable interest" (Hammond, 105).

According to this later critic, A Clergyman's Daughter is a 
successful experiment of Orwell on portraying a female character 
as its protagonist which he sees as a bold attempt "from the 
inside". Again he points out the fact that the effective handling 
of the third person narrative perspective enables the author to 
manipulate the characters with 'subtlety and assurance'. As the 
critic believes, the third chapter which is unmistakably an 
experimental attempt, was "consciously written under the 
influence of James Joyce's Ulysses", and in fact "is remarkable 
for its descriptive frame work and sustained dramatic power".
(Hammond, 105) Dorothy Hare, the protagonist of Orwell this 
time, is an unmarried girl in her twenties, the only child of 
Rev. Charles Hare, Rector of St. Athlestan's, Knype-Hill, Suf­
folk.

Dorothy's life is a sad tale of repression, drudgery and 
despair that never ends. After her mother's death she takes over
the entire responsibility of her home and church. She is looked upon as a sort of unpaid curate by her father and steadily works a seventeen-hour day under inhospitable circumstances of terrible physical and mental pressure.

Dorothy runs the house on mounting debts as the real expenses far supersede the amount her father pays her. Hence, strictly speaking, it is not poverty, but the continual nagging and pressure of the traders in the face of the mounting debts on the one hand and on the other, the insensitive, callous, but never-so-poor parishioner-father who ignores Dorothy's repeated entreaties to wind up the loan eventually break her down. She is, at last, caught up in a neurosis that relapses her into a spell of amnesia, rather 'somnambulism' which continues for about a month, and, in the process, exposes her to further ordeals, from sleeping on the Trafalgar Square, hoo-picking, being arrested for begging to sleeping in a brothel unaware.

Thus the money factor or the crisis arising thereof, acts as the main motif in this novel. A look at the tortuous daily routine and the sort of existence that Dorothy has, would certainly bring this point home.

The very first thought that haunts Dorothy's consciousness invariably after she gets up daily well before sunrise and takes an icy-cold bath in the chilly winter morning, is, that of the pending bills: "the bill at Cargill's, the butcher's, which had been owing for seven months. The thought is agonizing and just lurks "round the corner of her consciousness", day in and day out. (ACD,8)
And it was quite often, almost in regular intervals, Dorothy would feel the convulsive spasm inside, with all her consciousness centered either on the pending hills and the pester ing dealers, or on the shoe-string budget she had to hang on:

Thirty-nine further days, with only three pounds nineteen and four pence ... (ACD, 31)

Such was the nature of Dorothy's agony in every wakeful moment of her life.

Atkin observes that, while imperialism was the first of the subjects that Orwell chose, the second was poverty. As he asserts: Orwell "examined poverty under modern conditions" (84). Robert Lee, however, sees from a different angle. Taking note of the terrible repression and despair of the home he maintains that "A Clergyman's Daughter is a clear step on the road to Animal Farm and 1984" (25-26).

Besides, the typical middle-class ambition to go up the rungs of the social and economic ladder is well reflected in the Rector's craze for investment in the shares, though it dwindles every year invariably.

And atop all, the Old Rector's reaction to the disappearance of his only child, a grown-up daughter, again was funny, though unfortunate. It was quite typical of the hollow, insensible middle-class English people who, under continuous stress and strain often lose their decency in life, their basic emotions for that matter. When the Rector is told about Dorothy's disappearance, his immediate reaction was:
Run away from home! At this hour of the morning?
And what about breakfast... (ACD, 167)

Moreover, "for the rest of the day he was far too busy raging over unpunctual meals" and did scarcely think or do anything about his grown-up daughter's missing. (ACD, 167)

Such queer, inhuman, bizarre, rather slovenly attitude of a father to a daughter amply explains Dorothy's tragedy in life; her amnesia, her untold suffering. It was a clear case of "man's inhumanity to man (Hartley, Critical Heritage, 59), an utter disregard for human decency, or the violation of 'human rights' as the political thinkers of the second half of this century would argue.

A man, who was never in want of means, sat callously on the mounting bills and exposed his grown-up daughter continually to the pestering of the mercenaries, was indeed a criminal. Thus, even when Dorothy is finally restored to her home, she could not be in any way better, obviously in such stifling, unchristian, debased surrounding with an inhuman father:

She began to meditate upon the nature of life...
life, if the grave really ends it, is monstrous and dreadful... there is no meaning in it, no purpose, no goal except the grave... (ACD, 259)

The above stock-taking that Dorothy does springs from an essentially existential conflict (Woodcock, 113) that haunts every protagonist of Orwell in all his pre-Spanish Civil War novels. And such conflict again arises from an agonizing consciousness of money, or the want of it, that is, poverty. As
V.S. Pritchett rightly observes on Dorothy, as a prototype of the middle class women in general:

... only a small turn of the wheel of fortune is needed for them to be thrown helpless among the dregs of society... there is no hope for them anyway. (Critical Heritage, 59)

Thus Dorothy, with her agony and conflicts, directly looks forward to Gordon Comstock, the protagonist of Orwell's next and the last novel of the pre-Spanish Civil War phase.

An overview of the discussion so far makes it clear that a progressive pattern is gradually evolving out of it. If we recall: Flory, the protagonist of Orwell's first novel Burmese Days was never more handicapped or in more disappointing circumstances than his successor, Dorothy. But Flory just finds himself overwhelmed in the face of the harsh reality and commits suicide before attempting at any conscious reasoning of the situation. Whereas, Dorothy, with her usual handicap as a girl and in more unfortunate and unavoidable circumstances, still struggles to hold on to reality. The secret with her is simply the fact that Dorothy, unlike her predecessor Flory, makes a conscious attempt to analyze and to reason out her predicament which sustains her in the face of great disappointments.

In the next novel, Keep the Aspidistra Flying, which is the last novel of this phase of Orwell's writing career, we have an intellectual protagonist, a poet of some promise, an ambitious artist, Gordon Comstock. Thus, in all probability, Gordon would
rise up to the occasion more promisingly than all his predecessors. This trend continues till Orwell finally acquires the vision, and the perspective that would make things clear to him. And that would mark the termination of this phase of dragging conflict and the existential struggle, in the face of overwhelming poverty.

- VI -

From *A Clergyman's Daughter* to *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* the theme is an extension of the same motif with, however, greater intensity. Gordon Comstock, the intellectual protagonist of this last novel of Orwell's pre-Spanish Civil War phase, continues to be tormented by the same nagging poverty and existential conflicts as his predecessor Dorothy Hare. But with Gordon the degree of suffering is more intense. Nevertheless, Gordon puts up an admirable resistance over a considerable period till the hostile circumstances of his life corner him finally.

Again, like *A Clergyman's Daughter* Orwell too was quite diffident about the publication of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. In a letter to George Woodcock, Orwell writes in 1948:

There are two or three books which I am ashamed of and have not allowed to be reprinted or translated, and that (*Keep the Aspidistra Flying*) is one of them. ([CEJLs. IV : 56](#))

Orwell further admits candidly that he had written
both these books particularly when he was desperate for money:

At that time I simply hadn't a book in me, but I was half starved and had to turn out something to bring in 100 £ or so. (CEJLs: IV, 56)

But, all the same, the role of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, despite its limitations, is highly positive in furthering Orwell's grasp of the reality and developing his artistic skill to handle the bitter reality of life in a literary framework. The theme of poverty, for that matter, is projected in a much sharper and more intense manner than his treatment in all the preceding works. The very epigraph that Orwell seems to have chosen with much care from the New Testament sets the tone of the novel:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not money, I am become as a sounding brass ... And though I have the gift of prophesy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge ... so that I could move mountains, and have not money, I am nothing. ... *I Corinthians* xiii (adopted).

The epigraph, as such, largely speaks of the thesis of the novel without any pretension or ambiguity. Poverty, thus, is the declared motif of the novel which is greatly representative of the cramping limitation of the middle class values that torments Gordon Comstock, the protagonist as much as George Orwell, the writer. It was written during those terrible days of bitter conflict and desperation when Orwell was struggling to shake off
all the prejudices and such other legacy of his middle class upbringing while in reality he was passing through nightmarish poverty that threatened even his integrity and very decency. Thus of all the novels of this phase, this book is overtly autobiographical. Gordon Comstock, the most thinly disguised protagonist of Orwell this time betrays him miserably.

The title of the book *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* reinforces the message of the epigraph and makes the perspective clear.

The aspidistra, as it were, is effectively used as the symbol of the pretentious, sham, middle-class money-based world that would never die, however hard and powerful the counter-force may be. Gordon Comstock, a promising young poet, who relentlessly fights against this aspidistra in order to have a bare hold on his integrity finally gives way, reversing his ideals and integrity back into the indestructible, formidable middle class values.

When the story begins, the protagonist Gordon Comstock, the last member of the Comstock family is already twenty-nine and "rather moth-eaten". Soon it becomes clear that "the Comstocks belonged to the most dismal of all classes, the middle-middle class, the landless gentry." *(KAF, 48)*

Thus, from the very beginning, the shadow of abject poverty is writ large in the novel. Just one cannot cover it up with the best care and efforts. The middle class vanity fails miserably in maintaining the appearance. Presently Gordon appears:
His coat was out at the elbow... and its middle button was missing; his readymade flannel trousers were stained and shapeless. Even from above you could see that his shoes needed resoling... (KAF,7)

Such was the poverty, grinding, naked, remorseless. It is this hopeless, unredeemable present exposed so alarmingly is rooted deep in a still more dismal past:

From his earliest childhood Gordon's relatives had depressed him horribly... They were all more or less alike - grey, shabby, joyless people, all rather sickly in health and all perpetually harassed by money-worries...

(KAF,50)

As he grew up, Gordon develops a strong reaction against 'the money God' and tries frantically not to fall a prey to its dehumanizing, monstrous trap. Besides, as a poet with some promise, he wants to pursue independently his creative career, and till the very last, resists all temptation to subordinate his freedom to the pursuit of money. As a matter of fact, for this Gordon, had to accept an utterly miserable, hopeless life. But with great determination he resists all offers and temptations for a comparatively smooth and comfortable career in an advertising company, The New Albion. But his tight-lipped resistance and struggle through his life collapses in a moment when he finds that his girl Rosemary carries his baby. Being cornered thus, now that he must have a family to support, Gordon finally succumbs to
the 'money God' and all his fight and struggle go to pieces in no time. Thus ends the conflict, the struggle, the resistance that the protagonist had admirably put up against the lure of money, the aspidistras, for that matter.

Now at last, after losing his battle finally, Gordon looks back with horror over the years he struggled with his mind and his flesh to "live like an anchorite outside the money-world" (KAF,291), but he couldn't. It only brought him misery, futility and a "frightful emptiness" (KAF,291). At this point, now that the journey into life has almost come full circle, Gordon realizes bitterly: "To abjure money is to abjure life", (KAF,291) and further, "The aspidistra is the tree of life" (KAF,293). That is the end, the end of Gordon's struggle, his conflict and misery.

Thus finally Keep the Aspidistra Flying ends, in the manner of other liberals of Orwell's time who always preferred an honest living to an unholy dying. As Philip Rieff (1954) rightly observes:

Orwell's problem is how to live honestly in a world that is no longer liberal (Kenyon Review, 49-50).

Despite all its alleged weaknesses at the plot, structure and characterization; KAF still takes a stride in furthering the cause of poverty as the dominant motif through all the writings of Orwell's pre-Spanish Civil War phase. Besides, it shows a remarkable development in the protagonist's growing ability of
reasoning and acceptance of the reality which precisely tends to give a comparatively tolerable ending of the story.

However, in the next documentary The Road to Wigan Pier, which in fact comes as the last major writing of Orwell in his pre-Spanish Civil War phase, the theme of poverty is greatly reinforced by factual details as the writer makes an on-the-spot reporting on the state of life in the coal mines and the Industrial North of England.

Orwell divides The Road to Wigan Pier into two parts. The first part gives a first-hand account of the appalling living conditions of the working class people of the mines and the Industrial North against a backdrop of mass unemployment before the second world war.

In the second part, Orwell takes an overview of the events and experiences in his life since his very childhood, through his days at the St. Cyprians', his period as a police officer in Burma and his 'Down and Out' days thereafter. Though greatly at the cost of its structural unity, as such, with a mess of autobiography, documentary and ideology the book still retains its significance in the development of Orwell's political thinking. This trip to the North remained particularly eventful and memorable because, it was the first opportunity for Orwell to come directly in touch with the working class and to mix with
them informally over an extended period of time. In the course of
his journey across the Wigan, Orwell made a first-hand observation
of the flagrant violations of the human rights (the 'common
decency' as he used to call) and for the first time in his life, Orwell hereafter consciously searched around for some viable solution to this gruesome state of affairs that he saw with his own eyes in the Wigan. For the first time again, Orwell, in *Road to Wigan Pier*, calls himself a socialist, though his political ideas still remained immature, vague and unformed. Though his political ideas were yet to settle and, as such, were in the formative stage, Orwell still looked forward to Socialism as the only source of hope in the maddening state of affairs.

Orwell's sudden faith in the viability of Socialism has an interesting background. Firstly, Orwell's life-long struggle against his middle class snobbishness and prejudice against the working class population 'who smell' was nearly resolved during his tour across Wigan. This very realization gave him a tremendous boost and encouragement and precisely made him confident enough to declare himself a Socialist at last.

The other factor that accelerated his commitment to Socialism was the menacing rise of the Fascist forces in Germany and Italy that added a sense of terrible urgency to the situation. And the intellectuals in the 30's, by and large, were caught between the devil and the deep sea. Orwell, with his own vision of Socialism, looked forward to it as the only tolerable alternative left for the human race.
As Arthur Koestler too reveals a similar spirit which, in fact, was rather typical of the time when, to be politically committed was almost a necessity:

In the nineteen-thirties conversion to the communist faith was not a fashion or a craze, it was a sincere and spontaneous expression of our optimism born of despair: an abortive revolution of the spirit, a misfired Renaissance, a false dawn of history. To be attracted to the new faith was, I still believe, an honourable error. We were wrong for the right reasons.

(Arrow in the Blue, 259. Emphasis mine)

Orwell's commitment to socialism, however, still remained incomplete owing to some drawbacks, in spite of his recent workable compromise with the deep-seated class prejudice. They were, firstly, his congenital pessimism that grew out of his 'lower-upper-middle class' background, his chronic illness and his unimpressive personality. Socialism, as a matter of fact, is only for the optimists who can see hope in the face of disaster. Secondly, Orwell had, somehow, developed an idea that Industrialization of society was unconducive to socialism (Critical Heritage, 96)

These two formidable limitations that lay heavy in the mind of Orwell did not allow him to attain his political conviction
till he went to the Spanish Civil War. Thus, until this point, Orwell's Socialism remains largely 'emotional' rather than practical.

"Orwell's path towards Socialism" as Bernard Crick (1988) says, "was slow and unsure". (4). As Orwell himself reviews his own past, it is necessary to show the slow, gradual development of Orwell's thinking over a period of a complete decade since 1927 when he quit his job in the Indian Police. This period, from 1927 to 1937 till Orwell joined the Spanish Civil War, is particularly worth noting, as Crick (1988) very rightly comments, "Orwell never changed his values after 1936." (12)

As Orwell clearly acknowledges in "Why I Write", till as late as 1935 he was still indecisive about his political ideology. As he recollects: "Then came Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, etc. By the end of 1935 I had still failed to reach a firm decision." (CEJLS: I, 26-27)

And Orwell further remembers that during that period he was painfully undergoing the terrible conflict, the dilemma "between the Priest and the Commissar" (CEJLS: I, 27)

In the previous sections we have already analyzed the two polemics "A Hanging" (1931) and "Shooting an Elephant" (1936), and his first novel Burmese Days those bear considerable relevance to the development of Orwell's mind as they show the earliest political reactions of Orwell which were largely directed against imperialism. Orwell recorded his reflections on his Burmese experiences much later, rather with a hind-sight, as he
got lost in the slums of Paris and London as a 'down and out', a dish-washer for sometime, and a tramp for the major period of the time.

Besides Orwell's Burmese Days and the other two polemics on the Burmese backdrop, the next literary work of this period with some significance in the context of the development of his mind is Down and Out in Paris and London. In this piece of autobiography that Orwell wrote out of his own first-hand experience of poverty, starvation and squalor over a period of eighteen months partly as an act of voluntary expiation and renunciation to undo what he had done as an agent of the immoral colonial set up in India. Wyndham Lewis writes that Orwell was "determined to identify himself with the lowest of the low." (Philip Rieff, 51). And partly too, Orwell was resolved to touch the bottom of the social hierarchy, to experience the same horror of hunger and squalor that millions of people were condemned to in England and Europe particularly during the years preceding the World War II. But, with all his noble intentions and the best of efforts Orwell could not succeed. And the main factor that stood in his way was the deep-seated class prejudice and snobbishness that he carried from his very birth in a 'lower-upper-middle class' family and was later reinforced during his residential school days at the St. Cyprians'. Nevertheless, Orwell concludes DOPL with a clear note of resolution and optimism which was quite unusual for him during that period particularly. As he concludes, he declares "that is a beginning" (313).

The 'beginning' that Orwell announces here, as I strongly
believe, is the beginning of his life-long mission in search of human values that he later encapsulates in the term 'common decency'. And one cannot deny the fact that Orwell's bitterness about the British imperialism in India and finally his resignation from service was part of an unconscious process to begin the struggle for this 'common decency'. Even until the end of DOPL when he formally declares his mission, he does not seem to be very clear, let alone confident, about what he says. This very statement, a sort of prophecy, is thus an involuntary outburst of the things that was troubling Orwell all along. But all the same, as Orwell stands at that point, he lacks conviction and firmness which he later confesses in 'Why I Write' (CEJLS 1:27), his two novels A Clergyman's Daughter (1935) and Keep the Aspidistra Flying (1936) including the Burmese Days (1934) bear strong evidence of the writer's lack of firmness and conviction. Orwell in fact, with his unquestionable honesty and integrity, admits the fact when he writes about his early novels:

I wanted to write enormous naturalistic novels with unhappy endings, full of detailed descriptions and arresting similes, and also full of purple passages in which words were used partly for the sake their sound. (CEJLS 1:25)

Although Orwell makes the above observation specifically in the context of Burmese Days, it is applicable to the next two novels as well. These two novels (ACD and KAF) are disappointing as Orwell seems to have totally lost his perspective. Alex Zwerdling, who traces the development of Orwell's Socialism
observes, "Keep the Aspidistra Flying comes closer to having a coherent political vision, and yet too is finally balked by its obsession with money" (64). The statement, as such, is self-contradictory. Rather in this context Philip Rieff's (1954) observation on Orwell sounds more convincing. He writes:

Honest living has always interested liberals more than holy dying: Orwell's problem is how to live honestly in a world that is no longer liberal, and his unique perspective on the politics and poverty at the world was gained from being very honestly involved in both. (49-50)

The little sparks of political vision that we see in Burmese Days and Down and Out get totally lost in the next two novels, in which 'poverty' continues to be the dominant and the only motif. As such, Orwell's vision is totally restricted to the theme of 'biological sustenance'. The theme of abject 'poverty, as it were, preoccupied Orwell's mind to such an extent that he was temporarily cut off from the main perspective declared at the end of DOPL. Orwell's vision was shrouded in the murky atmosphere of appalling poverty and despair that was in fact the after-effect of his sordid experiences as a 'down and out' in the slums of Paris and London. However, the phase short-circuited the process for a while.

The sparks, the flashes of Orwell's political vision that appeared last in BD show up again in The Road to Wigan Pier, the
documentary he brought out of his tour across the mines towns of Wigan and his partial triumph over his rather congenital class prejudice. In the course of his extended tour through the mines and industrial township of the North, Orwell, for the first time in life, could feel the real taste of fraternity with the working-class people. The difference, the change is visible, from the gloomy, depressing circumstances of Dorothy Hare (ACD) and Gordon Comstock (KAF) to the note of hope, though very thin in RWP. The Road to Wigan Pier, despite Orwell's vivid portrayal of the beastly existence of the miners and the workers of Wigan still carries some rays of hope. It is here that Orwell could somehow get over his prejudice against the working-class people and thus, the experience becomes eventful and significant. Orwell writes with a feeling of great relief and fulfilment:

Now a days, thank god, I have no feelings of that kind. A working man's body, as such, is no more repulsive to me than a millionaire's.

(RWP, 115)

This is, indeed, a remarkable achievement, a great leap forward to socialism in marked contrast with his life-long, formidable taboo, the physical feeling that"the lower classes smell"(RWP, 112). Orwell, reviewing his life since childhood in the 'lower-upper-middle class' surroundings, at the St.Cyprians' in Burma and as a 'down and out' in Paris and London makes a sincere attempt to trace back the origin and persistence of his class prejudice, and makes the objective of his trip to the coal mines of Lancashire and Yorkshire quite clear:
I went there partly because I wanted to see the most typical section of the English working class at close quarters. This was necessary to me as part of my approach to Socialism. (RWP, 106)

Thus it becomes evident that Orwell's political awareness that commences from his days in Burma got stuck up temporarily through ACD and KAF revives again in The Road to Wigan Pier. The revival became possible precisely because of his realization that the abolition of classes could be possible, which was the necessary precondition to go for an egalitarian, classless social structure. Orwell projects his earlier apprehension and misgivings about it thus:

Perhaps this class-breaking business isn't so simple as it looked! On the contrary, it is a wild ride into the darkness, and it may be that at the end of it the smile will be on the face of the tiger. (RWP, 148)

Although, with his self-confidence freshly boosted by his considerable progress in shedding his class prejudice, Orwell still has a long way to go to attain political conviction. The state of affairs around, the serious mess created out of mass unemployment, the political chaos and uncertainty in the face of rising Fascism drive Orwell to the conclusion that there is "no chance of those conditions showing any fundamental improvement" (RWP, 149).
Orwell clearly sees through the monstrosity of the situation when he cries out, "we are living in a world in which no body is free, in which hardly any body is secure, in which it is almost impossible to be honest and to remain alive." (RWP, 149)

These reactions are in fact the beginning of Orwell's renewed phase of Socialism, with his class prejudice mostly gone. And this agonizing realization of the helplessness and the impenetrable gloom around brings him flashes of political insight that steadily guide him along the path of uncertainty till he gets into the Spanish Civil War. Even at this point, Orwell shows his tentative faith in Socialism: "Socialism, as a world system and wholeheartedly applied, is a way out." (RWP, 149)

But all the same, Orwell's concept of Socialism remains very limited and vague when he thinks that "it would at least ensure our getting enough to eat even if it deprives us of everything (RWP, 149)

Thus, even till this point Orwell continues to see everything from the point of 'food', the narrow 'biological factor' only. He still continues to contemplate on food as the primary need of an individual. Thus as we find, till as late as 1936 when Orwell had written his three novels, his autobiographical piece (DOPL) and was very near the completion of his documentary, The Road to Wigan Pier, he still looks upon the pure biological issues of life like food as the safety-catches of 'Common Decency'. Even though he utters something higher; his voice lacks conviction, firmness and certainty as:

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Socialism does not mean much more than better wages and shorter hours and nobody bossing you about. . . and that Socialism means justice and common decency. (RWP, 154)

This simple, mechanical utterance of the objectives of Socialism as he vaguely imagined at this point of his life only gets confirmed after his Spanish Civil War experience. The 'justice' and 'common decency' that Orwell here talks about is strictly in the context of economic justice, parity and some sort of manageable decency in existence and survival. Its implications become clearer when Orwell asserts: "Every empty belly is an argument for Socialism"(RWP, 150).

Till 1936, when Orwell completed his tour of the Wigan, his ideas about Socialism remained, by and large, unsure and unconfirmed. After his first-hand knowledge of the awful living conditions of the people in the mines and industrial towns and his sense of growing alarm and tension at the menacing rise of Fascism Orwell could, just in a state of utter helplessness and confusion, lay his hands on Socialism which he vaguely thought to be the only way out. The urgency and alarm in Orwell's voice is clearly reflected when he argues, "The choice is not, as yet, between a human and inhuman world. It is between Socialism and Fascism . . . "(RWP, 193).

And he visualizes the horror in the face of the fast growing Fascism in Europe:
At this moment Socialists almost everywhere are in retreat before the onslaught of Fascism, and events are moving at a terrible speed. (RWP, 150)

Such was the desperation, apprehension and terror that occupied Orwell's mind when he finished his documentary The Road to Wigan Pier. Orwell continues:

"As I write this the Spanish Fascist forces are bombarding Madrid, and it is quite likely that before the book is printed we shall have another Fascist country to add the list." (RWP, 150)

Thus Orwell's mind was all set on the issue. He wanted to prevent Fascism at any cost, by any means. And Socialism was the only available, viable means at the hour. But one thing stood in his way formidably, after his partial triumph over class prejudice. It was his strong belief that Socialism and Industrialism cannot go together. He is, therefore, shocked to observe:

"The first thing to notice is that the idea of Socialism is bound up, more or less inextricably, with the idea of machine production." (RWP, 164)

Orwell's notion about mechanization and Socialism had its own logic, however.

Somehow, the idea has gone deep into Orwell's mind that mechanization not only tends to make an able individual dependent and in the process snatch away his freedom; it also mars the proper growth of 'life' as such. "It is only in our own age, when mechanization has only triumphed", affirms Orwell, "that we can actually feel the tendency of the machine to make a fully human life impossible." (RWP, 167)
Thus, until Orwell was cleared of his misconception he could not grasp 'Socialism properly and thus failed to acquire any political conviction. And it miraculously happened soon after Orwell went to Spain, where he saw socialism in flesh and blood in a large complex modern city like Barcelona. This direct experience finally convinced Orwell that Socialism could go together with Industrialism, with the working class in the saddle. Thus Bernard Crick (1988) rightly comments that before coming to Spain Orwell's Socialism was merely "cerebral or intellectual" (8). And Alex Zwerdling's observation on this is that Orwell could properly grasp socialism "only when he went to Spain at the end of 1936" (75). This precisely explains Orwell's feeling of ecstasy and rapture when he reached Spain. As he writes to Cyril Connolly from Spain (8 June 1937):

I have seen wonderful things and at last really believe in Socialism, which I never did before.

(CEJLs: I, 301).

And this again explains why Orwell, who initially went to Spain as a reporter, joined instantly as a militia. As he recalls in Homage to Catalonia:

There was much in it that I did not understand . . . but I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for. (9)

In Spain, therefore, Orwell's hitherto "emotional
"Scientific Socialism" (Critical Heritage, 98).

Orwell's first exposure to the revolutionary atmosphere of the earlier days of the Spanish Civil War moved him greatly. His experiences, as he recalls later, were simply incredible.

Spain remains an unforgettable, inalienable part of Orwell's life, art and faith. First of all, it was in Spain that he realized his moment of truth as and when he met the unknown Italian militiaman. Secondly, it was in Spain that Orwell could get over his long brewing misconception that Socialism and Industrialism cannot go together. Thirdly, the class prejudice and snobbishness that he almost inherited as a legacy of his lower-upper-middle class heritage and only partly relinquished during his tour across the mining towns of Wigan is completely done away with in Spain. And lastly, Orwell's congenital pessimism gave way, temporarily though, at his exposure to the revolutionary atmosphere in Barcelona. It was something like running into a paradise on this sordid earth.

Spain, thus, played a decisive role in Orwell's life and career. All his political ideas underwent a sea-change with his experiences in the Spanish Civil War. He had, no doubt, an inclination toward Socialism. But his ideas were vague and unfounded. It was the Spanish Civil War that gave him a first-hand-knowledge of 'Socialism'. And, it was here that he could get
over his long persisting internal struggle of class-prejudice. Above all, Orwell could see through his illusion about the glamour of Communism soon after his experiences there. He could detect the devil working beneath the camouflage of Communism. And it is Orwell who, as early as 1937 did boldly declare that "Communism was a counter-revolutionary force" (CEJLS, 302) which the intellectuals, by and large, did not realize before another decade quietly passed by.

As such, the Spanish Civil War for Orwell, was inevitably an eye-opener, a decisive factor, "a turning-point" (HC, 48) in his life and career. As Alex Zwerdling very rightly observes:

The Spanish Civil War was the pebble thrown into the pond; its ripples would fan out until every placid corner of Orwell's mind had felt the disturbance. Finally, it would threaten the very basis of his faith, not only in Socialism, but in human decency. (82)

The manner in which the P.O.U.M. volunteers (he himself was a member of that militia) were hunted down, the way the purging was conducted, branding them as Trotskyists (more nightmarish still the Moscow trial, the purge in Russia), killing their own party-men, their co-volunteers on false, fabricated accusations of treachery, knocked Orwell down. It broke his illusion harshly and made him acutely aware of the reality. He could realize the horrifying aspects of the real Communism. And those experiences, sensations and nightmares down his pulses were
eventually sublimated into his creation of such monumental works like Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four. As Orwell admits:

The Spanish Civil War and other events in 1936-7 turned the Scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. (CEJLS: I, 28)

As Jenni Calder points out, the Spanish Civil War "confirmed and classified his belief in Socialism in England." (100)

Orwell's 'Socialism' was nothing but another name for his subjective symbol of 'common decency'. Orwell's politics ideal was never based on any dogma, creed or orthodox faith. It was entirely based upon his vision of a classless social order with complete equality and respect for each other. His emphasis on 'common decency' had an intensity usually found in the fanatics. But, as such, Orwell with his deep commitment to secularism almost had a similar faith in and regard for that value. The spirit of Orwell is rightly expressed by John Atkins who believes strongly that Orwell "might have said that by their decency they could move mountains. When the mass of the people decide that they will no longer treat others as enemies but as brothers nothing will stop them." (19)

Orwell simply looked for the optimum welfare and freedom for the maximum number of people in an atmosphere of minimal state.
And in his raw, immature political background, Orwell vaguely looked forward to 'Socialism' as the right or the only organized creed capable of giving shape to his vision. But his illusion about 'Socialism' and its potential or efficacy vanished as soon as he saw the fast-degeneration of 'Socialism' in Spain under the direct supervision of the Soviet Communist Party, the first and the most loudly acclaimed champion of Socialism. Orwell's disillusionment synchronized with that of many other intellectuals of the time (The God that failed). Atkin puts it thus:

Spain gave him no political answer, but it did convince him that his instinctive trust in the decency of human individuals was more valid than a mere faith in political panaceas.

Before the discussion proceeds further into the final transformation of Orwell through the Spanish Civil War, it is necessary to take stock of the development of Orwell's political thinking till he finished his tour across the Wigan as recorded in his documentary The Road to Wigan Pier.

Orwell's journey across the mines and the Industrial North of England politically enlightened him to a great extent besides clearing the long standing class barrier considerably. Now that Orwell's chronic hatred and fear of the working class people got largely neutralized, he with his near complete identification with the plight of the working class realized the horror of their
existence more acutely than ever. In such a hopeless, perplexing state of affairs, 'Socialism' appeared to him as the only alternative left. With his no-direct, rather purely second-hand knowledge about 'Socialism' he could vaguely look upon it as the lone savior of the suffering millions. But, at the same time, Orwell was no blind follower of any dogma or creed. He believed in the Socialism that must be "a Part with genuinely revolutionary intentions" (RWP, 202) and expresses his contempt for the stock jargon like "class Consciousness", "expropriation of the expropriators", "bourgeois ideology", and "Proletarian solidarity", "Sacred sisters", "thesis, antithesis, and synthesis" etc associated with the Marxist propaganda. (RWP, 202). Above all, "All that is needed", affirms Orwell, "is to hammer two facts home into the public consciousness. One, that the interests of all exploited people are the same, the other, that Socialism is compatible with common decency." (RWP, 203) (emphasis mine)

The above excerpt makes Orwell's concept of 'Socialism' clear and brings out its originality and unorthodoxy. Orwell emphasizes on two things --- the contempt for the hackneyed Marxist jargon and, his particular faith in the 'Common decency', which he took as almost a synonym for 'Socialism'. Orwell till this point still continues to hover around his strictly limited vision of human values which he otherwise expressed as 'common decency'. After his own bitter experiences as a child in a 'lower-upper-middle class' family, his sad circumstances at St. Cyprians', his voluntary plunge into the world of the half-fed, struggling millions in the European metropolis, and, subsequently his direct knowl-
edge by way of considerable identification with the misery and suffering of the miners and the industrial workers in England, Orwell could not possibly see anything beyond the bare physical and biological needs of an individual. Thus Orwell's concept of socialism at this point was precisely the assurance of the indispensable minimum to a human being. What Orwell meant by it was simply:

Enough to eat, freedom from the hunting terror of unemployment . . . a bath once a day, clean linen reasonably often, a roof that does not leak and short enough working hours to leave you with a little energy when the day is done. (LBSW, 244)

And from this narrow, circumscribed concept of Socialism, Orwell rises above only when he goes through his final transformation during the Spanish Civil War where he participates as a voluntary-fighter to defend their Republic against the usurpation of the Fascist bullies.

As Orwell himself acknowledges, he went to Spain to fight for 'Common decency' and to fight against 'Fascism'. His memoir, Homage to Catalonia is an objective account of Orwell's quest for and the final discovery of the 'common decency' in the course of the Spanish Civil War. It was the Spanish Civil War, therefore, that marked the turning point in his life as Orwell himself admits:

It formed a kind of interregnum in my life, quite different from anything that had gone before and perhaps from anything that is to come, and they
taught me things that I couldn't have learnt in any other way. (HC,101)


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