CHAPTER - VII

CONCLUSION

As far as it goes, in this research work on Orwell's literary criticism, what has been presented threadbare comprises Orwell's, Social, Political, Intellectual and Literary Tradition; his twin aspects: Creation and Criticism; some of his major critical essays and finally, his points of view in criticism; and now it is time to go on to sum up and say as clearly as possible something by way of a conclusion.

As a critic, Orwell has throughout remained free in steering clear from any commitment or association with any school of thought. He cannot be dubbed a pure moralist or a psychoanalytical critic or a critic of philosophical or moral slant. Nor does he appear to be a professional critic on any showing. Yet his practice of criticism ever remained a sustained and sincere effort that invites close attention.

Orwell says that as a rule, an aesthetic preference is either something inexplicable or it is so corrupted by non-aesthetic motives as to make one wonder whether the whole of literary criticism is not a huge network of humbug. This remark is a rare piece of original critical perception, judged against a valid set of values and yardsticks - a fact borne out by analyses of diverse aspects of the Orwellian phenomenon so far.
It amazes Orwell that even people who affect to despise Dickens’ quote him unconsciously. Now what does all this suggest? Is it not that somehow Dickens and his character are memorable? Dickens, the craftsman may not impress many, but his characters overwhelm everyone. Here is a point suggested by Orwell, and this is of great significance. This also illustrates the type of criticism Orwell is up to—a kind of practical criticism, not based so much on the set theories of fictional art, but on practically valid and commonsensically sound perceptions. This is really an advance, not only in Dickens’s criticism, but in the entire context of literary criticism.

Orwell says

“Dickens is not a “revolutionary” writer. There is no clear sign that he wants the existing order to be overthrown or that he believes it would make very much difference it were overthrown. There is not a line in the book that can properly be called socialistic; indeed, its tendency if anything is procapitalist, because its whole moral is that capitalists ought to be kind, not that workers ought to be rebellious.”

It is significant that Orwell sums up his argument with the following words:

Once again, “individual kindliness is the remedy for everything”.

This is a strikingly Orwellian stance, which enables him to attempt a very commonsensical approach to Dickens’s mind and art. His essay on Dickens is a very original and stimulating study of Dickens, stimulating because of the originality of approach.

1. George Orwell, ‘Charles Dickens, Critical Essays,’ P. 1
2. Ibid. p. 7
As for Tolstoy's condemnation of Shakespeare in *Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool*, Orwell proceeds to commend very prudently and manages to stay upon a very safe ground. He bases his literary judgement on the principle of common consent. In his judgement against anyone including Tolstoy, Orwell has no prejudice. As he draws a contrasting picture of Shakespeare to refute Tolstoy's charge against the latter as *no genius*, and not even *an average author*, Orwell emerges as a very fine critic as a result of his fine piece of criticism on Shakespeare.

Orwell's style of criticism in conducted with juridical flair and splendid argument in a detached manner. From his statement against Shakespeare, Tolstoy may be termed as a critic who looks for only the possibilities of edification in a work of art. As, it would appear, his idealistic approach is not likely to be fruitful in an endeavour to evaluate a work of art. But in contrast to Tolstoy, Orwell has fundamental virtues, honesty and decency that stand out on a new stance. He possesses very fine observations and perceptions. And his criticism is quite sensible and sound as Mr. Brander has stated.

"In this essay (Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool) more than anywhere else the reader is able to measure Orwell's mental and spiritual resources in later years".

3. Brackets mine
4. Lawrence Brander, *George Orwell* p. 56
Orwell thus comes up as a rare critic who stands in a special line. He is convincing critic, a sound critic and a competent critic. It is another matter and rather regrettable that he could not avail of these gifts because his literary years fell into a period which had been marked by social and political upheavals. Still he could emerge as a most active figure of his period.

In some quarters Orwell has been looked after as a flawed artist in that he had a tendency to consciously sacrifice his art to journalism. This allegation, however, does not stand the test of close critical scrutiny, and in this thesis there has been an elaborate attempt to counter this or any such allegation. Mr Q.D. Leavis also exonerates Orwell from this weakness when she says:

"in literature as in politics he has taken up a stand which gives him freedom"  

He is a free critic who does not formulate his personal impression into a law. Mr. Richard H. Rover estimated him as an old-fashioned critic because of the latter's choice of books that have been read by millions and leaving to other critics works of genius admired only in genius circles. This throws light on the true nature of Orwell's common pursuit as a literary critic.

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5. Q.D. Leavis, *A Review of Inside the Whale*, Scrutiny, September, 1940. p. 176
It appears that Orwell always meant to be a writer, an honest writer at that. He is able to write commonsensically that is so uncommon as to be a form of high intelligence. Raymond William says that

"... to be able to write like this was partly due to natural gifts, partly to deliberate professional practice (Orwell always meant to be a writer); and partly it is the product of a moral tension. It is informed by an urgent, nonconforming and humane personality." 6

All along Orwell appears to have forged his own distinct style, a direct, active, cogent and epigrammatic style. It has not many perhapses or somewhats or ratheres or probables or any sort of or on the whole. In fact it is a style that impresses anyone for its complete transparency. If it is a true maxim that style is the man, it has full application in case of George Orwell. Nothing stands between him and what he intends to say in the context of how he does it. In this he emerges as the twentieth-century version of Jonathan Swift.