CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

George Orwell is a multi-faceted personality: novelist, journalist, critic, politician, all these diverse roles he played from time to time and very well. Here, in this project, the purpose is to concentrate on his literary criticism.

His critical work non-existent earlier, by 1939 started drawing attention and even winning admiration. He could demonstrate a critical sensibility which since then, characterizes his mature criticism. He was a critic, but not one of the conventional, professional kind. His intuitive receptiveness, his occupation with the central human issues, his uncompromising honesty, and above all, his fierce moral passion rendered his critical work into a singular achievement.

For one thing, his literary criticism is not too 'literary.' To him literature is the one mode which best expresses the 'vital quality of modern civilization' as well as the authors concerned. Hence, his criticism, while concerned with the interpretation and evaluation of literary works, becomes at the same time, in Arnold's phrase, a criticism of life, that is, an interpretation and evaluation of the ways of living, feeling and thinking. What Orwell appears to have been looking for is the moral vision of political-prophet, perceives as struggling to emerge, with varying degrees of
success. His tremendous honesty, originality which by itself ought to have secured him a high standing among critics, seems on the contrary, to figure as a hindrance till recently in the way of his recognition as a literary critic.

George Orwell’s critical performance has gone unnoticed till very recently—just like his creative work which has taken long in achieving the reputation it deserves. Some have found Orwell’s criticism queer yet good, whereas horribly, the queerness of his criticism may be largely a matter of style and composition; its goodness however is due to its immense profundity, earnestness and centrality. Apart from embodying some very illuminating insights into the literary works in question, literary criticism in the hands of Orwell functions chiefly as a vehicle for an expensive and penetrating moral argument—the same that we find in the rest of his work. Moreover it is prophetic in so far it brings out from the works it handles not only the realized vision of life of the artist but also his unrealized vision, the vision which Orwell finds struggling for emergence but with partial or no success. Orwell more often reveals than states, and he reveals with an earnestness rare in detached, scholarly criticism.

Orwell is a decent man who could not tolerate gross and unhesitating falsification of facts. He hates all forms of suppression. He calls a spade a spade, a horse a horse and says two and two makes four and not five.

This love of truth, which marks his creative and polemical writing alike, has bearings on the evolution of his critical mind, his judgement of art as well as life. Also, this aspect of suppression of truth frightens him more than bombs.
Orwell is of the opinion that the language of free men must be vivid, candid and truthful. He denounces as an enemy - anyone who talks or writes in vague, woolly language, for instance, language which tends to veil issues it claims to be discussing. Taking refuge in vagueness shows hiding of something and Orwell detests this. While some people chose to be honestly dishonest, Orwell is brutally frank and honestly honest.

Orwell believes that an author who has sacrificed his intellectual freedom is finished as an author. He also believes that the ability to create, to imagine story and character depends on the free and wide ranging use of the mind. But this is exactly what an orthodoxy of any kind is designed to prevent. For instance, if simple peasants or grocers sacrifice their intellectual freedom, they can still go about their work efficiently, even though they have accepted a certain amount of built-in censorship. But this would simply finish writers or artists.

Orwell has always wanted to make political writing into an art. And what is more, he has amply succeeded in his attempt.

The aspect discussed in his created works is precisely a pointer to the subtle and profitable application of his preferences and values in the context of his judgement of other writer's works. Two very great examples that come to mind here are his essay on (i) *Charles Dickens* and another essay entitled, (ii) *Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool*. There are other writings also that one can lay hands on while searching for his critical survey. But in all these exercises he exhibits his love of truth as a fundamental aspect, in as much as to him it is not merely a moral virtue but also a literary virtue.
All this and several other allied aspects will have to be gone into in the following chapters. For the sake of convenience, however, the tentative chapter-division may be as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Social, Political, Intellectual and Literary Traditions.
3. The Formative years: an insight into the mind and art of George Orwell.
6. Points of view in criticism.
7. Conclusion.

Eric Arthur Blair (1903-50) began to write as George Orwell in 1933, the date of his first published book, *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Born in British-occupied India, he was educated in private schools in England and then became an officer in the Imperial Police, serving mainly in Burma. He resigned this post in 1927 and spent several years trying to establish himself as a writer. During the 1930s he published four novels: *Burmese Days* (1934), *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), and *Coming Up for Air* (1939). But he was better known in this period for his reporting and journalism, represented in part, by *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). From 1938 until his death he wrote several critical essays on literature, popular culture, and politics and ideology. It is probably fair to say that in the early
40's he was best-known for this work, and for his reporting and journalism. In 1945 he published Animal Farm, and gained a different and very much wider reputation. In 1949 he published Nineteen Eighty-Four, a book that not only confirmed and extended his wider reputation, but made him part of the climate of the age: a stimulus and a reference point in a period of bitter political controversy. This controversy has continued unabated since his death in 1950, and one of its results has been that all of his earlier work has been widely reprinted and extensively studied.

There can thus be very little pure study of Orwell, although as same forms of the political controversy have died down there have been more formal literary studies of his earlier work and, increasingly, of even his late controversial books. Indeed, questions about Orwell's practice as a critic seem inseparable from the political controversy that attends his writing. Yet it can be said with some certainty that whoever else might complain about the turbulent, partisan, and wide-ranging controversy that has surrounded Orwell's work, it would not be Orwell himself. Most of the ways in which he has been studied are the ways that he energetically practised. Whether they are always satisfactory is another question.

I have thus arranged the chapters in this thesis such that Orwell's background, Social, Political and Literary tradition be fully analysed before going into his formative years and his twin aspects: Creation and Criticism. The essays I have selected for concentrated textual study are only four and have sheer illustrative value, reflecting his outstanding points of view in criticism.