Chapter IV
ANIMAL FARM - A POLITICAL ALLEGORY
Orwell's close observation of and active participation in the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War opened his mind to realities which helped him heighten his political consciousness. This is manifest in Animal Farm. The deplorable role of the Communists in the Spanish Civil War made them look very small, opportunistic and stupid in the eyes of Orwell. As he writes:

As to the Russians, their motives in the Spanish War are completely inscrutable. Did they, as the pinks believed, intervene in Spain in order to defend democracy and thwart the Nazis? Then why did they intervene on such a niggardly scale and finally leave Spain in the lurch? or did they, as the catholics maintained, intervene in order to foster revolution in Spain? Then why did they do all in their power to crush the Spanish revolutionary movements, defend private property and hand power to the middle class as against the working class? or did they, as the Trotskyists suggested, intervene simply in order to prevent a Spanish revolution? Then why not have backed Franco? Indeed, their actions are most easily explained if one assumes that they were acting on several contradictory motives. I believe that in the future we shall come to feel that Stalin's foreign policy, instead of being so diabolically clever as it is claimed to be, has been merely opportunistic and stupid.

Orwell was deeply concerned about these inherent ambiguities in socialism and writes, "after Spain, I cannot help feeling that Russia, i.e. Stalin, must be hostile to

any country that is genuinely undergoing revolution. They would be moving in opposite directions. His understanding of the true character of the Stalinists and his objective analysis of the modus operandi of the totalitarian state were so disturbing to him that between the period of the end of the second World War and the publication of Animal Farm he was engrossed in thinking of how to bring their real natures to light. It was, really speaking, this indignation against Communism that went into the making of Animal Farm. Describing his attitude to the Soviet regime, Orwell writes in the Ukrainian edition of Animal Farm:

And so for the past ten years I have been convinced that the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the socialist movement. On my return from Spain I thought of exposing the Soviet myth in a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone and which could be easily translated into other languages. 3

George Orwell wanted to make the people in Western Europe know what the Soviet regime stood for. Under the circumstances, Orwell took it as his great duty to let the people of his country know the real face of the Communist Party. He wanted to unveil the reality and warn his countrymen against the 'totalitarian danger'. In his essay 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' Orwell stated that:

The real struggle is between revolution and counter-revolution, between the workers who are vainly trying to hold on to a little of what they won in 1936 and the Liberal-Communist bloc who are so successfully taking it away from them. It is unfortunate that so few people in England have yet caught up with the fact that Communism is now a counter-revolutionary force, that Communists everywhere are in alliance with bourgeois reformism and using the whole of their powerful machinery to crush or discredit any party that shows signs of revolutionary tendencies.

All through the 40's he was over-conscious of this idea. Orwell believed that the 'Soviet myth' was a negative influence on the Western Socialist movement. He was more than convinced that ever since 1930 that U.S.S.R. was progressing towards anything but socialism. He was struck by clear signs of its transformation into a hierarchical society in which the rulers have no more reason to give up their power than any other ruling class. The task of exposing the difference between the U.S.S.R. of 1917 and that of the forties to the workers and intelligentsia alike in a country like England was very arduous and cumbersome. The English quite innocently accepted the lies of the illusive totalitarian propaganda which caused great harm to the socialist movement in England and had serious consequences for English foreign policy. As Orwell says: "indeed, in my opinion, nothing has contributed so much to the corruption of the original idea of socialism as the belief that Russia..."
is a socialist country and that every act of its rulers must be excused, if not imitated". Thus we see Orwell crusading against the hypocrisy of the Russians. The exposure of such hypocrisy he considered to be his duty and this could be done best by fusing politics and art.

Politically, Orwell was against totalitarianism and for democracy and socialism. Orwell's motto is the establishment of a healthy democratic-socialist set-up in society. For Orwell, art and propaganda are never quite separable. Orwell looked upon creative art not as a special organ of mental activity totally cut off from the great happenings of the day to day world, like human suffering and political upheaval. Orwell writes: "The writers who have come up since 1930 have been living in a world in which not only one's life but one's whole scheme of values is constantly menaced. In such circumstances detachment is not possible". Orwell's response to the aestheticism of the modernists is clear in the following passage:

You cannot take a purely aesthetic interest in a disease you are dying from, you cannot feel dispassionately about a man who is about to cut your throat. In a world in which Fascism and socialism were fighting one another any thinking person had to take sides, and his feelings had to find their way not only into his writing but into his judgements on literature. Literature had to become political, because anything else would have entailed mental dishonesty.

That is why, Orwell paid minute attention to every political event taking place throughout the world.

Orwell's interpretation of the Spanish Civil War was in fact, quite singular - he subserves the political issues into his constant humanist agenda:

The central issue of the war was the attempt of people like this to win the decent life which they know to be their birthright. 8

So, what Orwell means is that war also must achieve a purpose. If it fails to achieve its aim as it happened in the Spanish Civil War, this is very unfortunate. There should be no mingling of any petty politics in any way. Its sole aim should be to gain peace, equality and fraternity. His major political allegory, Animal Farm (1945) was a long planned work resulting from his disillusionment with the Spanish Civil War. He himself wrote of it:

Animal Farm was the first book in which I tried with full consciousness of what I was doing to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole. 9

In his article 'As I Please' of 7th January 1944, in which Orwell painted the picture of the then dictators in a very caustic manner, he narrates how the idea of writing Animal Farm germinated in his mind:

The idea first occurred to me when I saw in Picture Post some 'stills' of Beaverbrook delivering a speech and looking more like a monkey on a stick than you would think possible for any one who was not doing it on purpose.  

He says in another place:

The actual details of the story did not come to me for some time until one day (I was then living in a small village) I saw a little boy, perhaps ten years old, driving a huge carthorse along a narrow path, whipping it whenever it tried to turn. It struck me that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them, and that men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat...I proceeded to analyse Marx's theory from the animal's point of view. To them it was clear that the concept of a class struggle between humans was pure illusion since whenever it was necessary to exploit animals, all humans united against them; the true struggle is between animals and humans.

The story element of Animal Farm is quite fanciful. It is about a farm in England run by a drunken man, Mr. Jones. This novel is basically an ironic reversal of the

prophecy propounded by the elderly pig who is called Old Major. His concern is mainly the destiny of the animal species. It is the animals that work, but they receive nothing in return. They get merely a means to continue life. It is, of course, a protest of the worker against the entrepreneur, a protest against exploitation and servitude, against back-breaking labour. He inspires cohesion among the animals by making them understand that they all share the same destiny. As a result of a revolutionary speech delivered by Major, all animals and birds unite against their human exploiter:

Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals. 12

By fighting a battle they drive out Mr. Jones from the farm. They run the farm by establishing an animal Government.

In the beginning Major's intentions for animals are undoubtedly noble. He conveys his message to animals through the song "Beasts of England":

Beasts of England, beasts of Ireland,
Beasts of every land and clime,
Hearken to my joyful tidings
Of the golden future time. 13

---

The song is a lampoon of the Communist Manifesto which envisages the creation of a classless society. The sweet rhythmic movement of the song works as a strong stimulation to the passion of the animals. It inspires the animals to strive to attain their freedom:

The singing of this song threw the animals into the wildest excitement. Almost before Major had reached the end, they had begun singing it for themselves. Even the stupidest of them had already picked up the tune and a few of the words, and as for the clever ones, such as the pigs and dogs, they had the entire song by heart within a few minutes.14

Old Major is the prophet of revolution. He calls upon the animals to have faith in his utterings and carry on the message of struggle to future generations of animals:

Fix your eyes on that, Comrades, throughout the short remainder of your lives! And above all, pass on this message of mine to those who come after you, so that future generations shall carry on the struggle until it is victorious.15

Old Major's speech delivered to the animals is aimed at stirring the deep emotions of the beasts, which creates a comic effect. As it is intended to be read not by animals but men. Old Major maintains that there is a divine law by which human beings and animals are supposed to live

15. Ibid, p.10.
in peace and harmony:

The soil of England is fertile, its climate is good, it is capable of affording food in abundance to an enormously greater number of animals than now inhabit it. 16

But the law of nature has been violated by man for his selfish ends. He has made the life of animals miserable, laborious, and short. Therefore, the animals must take the initiative to set right the wrong done by man to animals, which leads Old Major further to expound the ideology of animalism. There is an implicit humour on the surface level, but an intense irony emerges from the underlying pattern of the discourse that points to the way the majority of mankind has been reduced to the status of dumb animals. Old Major thus becomes the spokesman of exploited humanity:

Why then do we continue in this miserable condition? Because nearly the whole of the produce of our labour is stolen from us by human beings. There, Comrades, is the answer to all our problems. It is summed up in a single word—Man. Man is the only real enemy we have. Remove Man from the scene, and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever. 17

The main purport of the speech is a parody of the classic Communist text book indictment of capitalist exploitation and call for a class struggle. Old Major has called on the animals to convey his dream. Instead, he gives


a full denunciation of man exploiting animals. The final message of Old Major is the overthrow of the human race by rebellion. He does not know when the insurrection will come, but he must inculcate a hope and revolutionary spirit:

I do not know when that Rebellion will come, it might be in a week or in a hundred years, but I know, as surely as I see this straw beneath my feet, that sooner or later justice will be done. Fix your eyes on that, Comrades, throughout the short remainder of your lives.\(^\text{18}\)

Old major further adds:

'And remember, Comrades, your resolution must never flatter. No argument must lead you astray. Never listen when they tell you that Man and the animals have a common interest, that the prosperity of the one is the prosperity of the others. It is all lies. Man serves the interests of no creature except himself.\(^\text{19}\)

This message of hope and future victory of animals as delivered in old Major's speech has both religious and political overtones. But the artistic import of Old Major's speech is not clear till we come to the end of the novel. The irony is that the prophet of revolution was totally ignorant of the subversive consequences of the message he gave to the animals. Old Major fails to anticipate the tyranny of the pigs upon other animals, and instead delivers the message of unity:

\(^{18}\) Ibid, p.10.  
\(^{19}\) Ibid, p.11.
And among us animals let there be perfect unity, perfect comradeship in the struggle. All men are enemies. All animals are comrades. 20

The revolution comes to the farm. It comes unexpectedly at an earlier time than had been hoped. It is the deus-ex-machina, by which the author satirizes the revolutionary fervour of a society on the eve of success of a rebellion. The animals hardly believe in their good fortune. "They rolled in the dew, they cropped mouthfuls of the sweet summer grass, they kicked up clods of the black earth and snuffed its rich scent. Then they made a tour of inspection of the whole farm and surveyed with speechless admiration the ploughland, the hayfield, the orchard, the pool, the spinney. It was as though they had never seen these things before, and even now they could hardly believe that it was all their own." 21.

After liberating themselves from the tyranny of man, the animals slide towards the tyranny of the pigs. It symbolises the ignorance and helplessness of the proletariat in the state of political turmoil. The author has beautifully depicted the feeling of pathos through the character of Boxer, the horse, who works hard after the revolution. He believes in the words of Napoleon. He never protests against his orders. He works harder and harder

20. Ibid, p.11.
under the illusion of a sincere ignorance that he works for the welfare of animals, whereas ironically, he contributes towards strengthening the tyranny of the pigs. Soon after the revolution is achieved, the first human tendency among pigs is revealed:

During the past three months they had taught themselves to read and write from an old spelling book which had belonged to Mr. Jones's children and which had been thrown on the rubbish heap.22

Thereafter the name of Manor Farm is changed into Animal Farm. Further, the principles of animalism are turned into Seven Commandments which would 'form an unalterable law by which all the animals on Animal Farm must live for ever after.' 23 They are supposed to constitute the 'unalterable law' but in fact all these commandments are flouted by the pigs. Their altering of commandments also speak volumes for the hollowness of Communism.

As the story develops, Napoleon's increasing hunger for power destroys all the noble ideals of the Animal Farm. His sudden attack and victory over Snowball in a meeting is the victory of the dictator over the democrat. Reality is distorted and in place of comment there is only "Napoleon is always right". Napoleon rarely meets an animal on the farm.

22. Ibid, p.22.
He feels superior to animals and extends his relationship with other neighbouring farms controlled by human beings. His luxurious private life is a clear violation of the ideals of the animal society. Squealer's lie about the progress of the farm under the presidency of Napoleon is a mockery of the poor lot of animals who begin to feel that they were better fed in Jones's time. The growling of dogs and the imposition of silent obedience to Napoleon create a fearful situation on the farm. The forces of evil begin to dominate the atmosphere of the farm. The terror and slaughter, the cut in the ration of working animals and 'forced collectivization' allude to the 'totalitarian' method of suppression. Boxer, the most hard-working and loyal animal on the farm, remains uncared for when he falls ill and is finally sent to the knacker's house just as he would have been in the 'human' era. The revolutionary spirit of the first chapter, where Major exposes Man as the only enemy of Animals, is contrasted with Napoleon's meeting with his human neighbours over a cup of wine in the last chapter:

Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from Man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which. 24

24. Ibid, p.120.
Later on, the reader also learns that the message of Old Major is flouted to suit the convenience of pigs who look after their own interests and forget all about the interests of their fellow beasts. His message which becomes the basis for the seven commandments of animalism is so whittled down and altered that ultimately the truth and the spirit of his principles are gone for ever. His message to the animals had been to remember their enmity towards man and abjure all his ways:

Whatever goes upon two legs, is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. And remember also that in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices. No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in trade. All the habits of Man are evil. And, above all, no animal must ever tyrannize over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers. No animal must ever kill any other animal. All animals are equal.25

All these noble ideas are abandoned and forgotten by the end of the novel. The speech of old Major had led to class consciousness among animals for they began to understand the nature of human tyranny over them. The allegory of class struggle is obvious throughout the novel—animals represent proletarians and the humans, the exploiters and capitalists. The most intense moment of class struggle is the scene in which Napoleon, Snowball, and

25. Ibid, pp.11-12.
Squealer lead other pigs in spreading the message of rebellion. "These three had elaborated Old Major's teachings into a complete system of thought, to which they gave the name of animalism."\(^{26}\)

In a way Animal Farm is an anatomy of political revolutions. All revolutions start with certain ideals of moral purity; once the old political system is overthrown, power is grabbed by a coterie, here by pigs. Then moral corruption sets in. Pigs do not work. They assume the leadership. They start by taking the milk of cows, then apples, and so on. They also resort to building a fear psychosis to perpetuate their self-interest. They take on to themselves the self-appointed role of supervisors and exploiters of other animals. They resort to killing those animals who protest against them in order to inculcate fear among the others. The pigs not only move to the farm house, drink alcohol, and sleep on beds but also resort to human ways like walking on two legs, smoking, and having discussions with the humans. At the end it becomes difficult to distinguish between pig and man. They have adopted all the pernicious human tendencies. In fact, they become worse masters than was Mr. Jones. Thus they betray the revolution. Except for the pigs and dogs, the lives of other animals become more miserable: the shortage of food is so great that starvation seems to stare them in the face and they are more hungry and overworked in the regime of the pigs.

\(^{26}\) Ibid, p.16.
Orwell's analysis has the deeper message that revolutions do not necessarily change the human situation for the better. It is very likely that the aftermath of revolutions may bring more misery to common men. Improvement of the human situation is not an easy task. Orwell's satiric vision has pathos as well as irony.

The novel has also an existential meaning for Orwell who sees the twentieth century as a watershed in the struggle for individual freedom. The society, the system, and the world around the individual are hostile to his individual aspirations. When the utility of a person is over, he is ruthlessly discarded without any warning. The fate of Boxer is the fate of any worker in the capitalist as well as the totalitarian society. The horse works with utmost dedication, but when he becomes helpless because of his broken knee, he is sent to the knacker's to be slaughtered brutally - and this in a regime run by fellow animals. His struggle depicts the insignificance of man in a power structure dominated by vested interests.

In one sense Animal Farm is a political allegory of the contemporary Soviet society. The resemblance of Napoleon to Stalin and Snowball to Trotsky has been often remarked. Orwell has written that "although the various episodes are taken from the actual history of the Russian Revolution, they are dealt with schematically and their chronological
order is changed. There are more than one or two things which show that the novel has direct resemblance to the Soviet situation. Jeffery Meyers writes:

The human beings are capitalists, the animals are Communists, the wild creatures who could not be tamed and continued to behave very much as before are the muzhiks or peasants, the pigs are the Bolsheviks, the Rebellion is the October Revolution, the neighbouring farmers are the western armies who attempted to support the Czarists against the Reds, the wave of rebelliousness that ran through the countryside afterwards is the abortive revolutions in Hungary and Germany in 1919 and 1923, the hoof and horn is the hammer and sickle, the Spontaneous Demonstration is the May Day Celebration, the order of the Green Banner is the order of Lenin, the special pig committee presided over by Napoleon is the Politbureau, the revolt of the hens—the first rebellion since the expulsion of Jones (the Czar)—is the sailors' rebellion at the Kronstadt naval base in 1921, and Napoleon's dealings with Whymper and the Willingdon markets represent the Treaty of Rapallo, signed with Germany in 1922, which ended the capitalists' boycott of Soviet Russia.

Though Meyer's parallels may appear to be overdone, some of these connections appear to have been intended by Orwell himself. Peter Davison observes in George Orwell: A Literary Life:

...Orwell had to explain to him [Dwight Macdonald] that he did mean the book to be primarily, a satire on the Russian Revolution:

The turning point of the story was supposed to be when the pigs kept the milk and the apples for themselves (Kronstadt)...

By Kronstadt Orwell meant the 1921 mutiny of the sailors at that naval base in support of strikers in Leningrad over shortage of food.29

This fact is also supported by a letter which Orwell wrote to his literary agent - "If they question you again, please say that Animal Farm is intended as a satire on dictatorship in general but of course the Russian Revolution is the chief target. It is humbug to pretend anything else"30.

Nevertheless, the fact that Orwell also intended to place Animal Farm within a wider frame of reference and give it a more universal significance is borne out by another part of his letter to Dwight Macdonald:

But I did mean it to have a wider application in so much that I meant that kind of revolution (violent, conspiratorial revolution, led by unconsciously power-hungry people) can lead only to a change of masters. I meant the moral to be that revolutions only effect a radical improvement when the masses are alert and know how to chuck out their leaders as soon as the latter have done their job.31

31. Peter Davison, George Orwell, A Literary Life, op.cit, p.127.
That it is the betrayal of the revolution as a result of innate human weakness, rather than the fact of revolution itself, that constituted Orwell's central concern in *Animal Farm*, may be inferred from a slightly earlier (1938) review that Orwell wrote of Jack Commen's *The Freedom of the Streets*:

> It would seem that what you get over and over again is a movement of the proletariat which is promptly canalized and betrayed by astute people at the top, and then the growth of a new governing class. The one thing that never arrives is equality. The mass of the people never get the chance to bring their innate decency into the control of affairs, so that one is almost driven to the cynical thought that men are only decent when they are powerless. 32

The contrast between Napoleon and Boxer comes immediately to mind. In fact, this passage, which could well serve as an epigraph to *Animal Farm*, focuses Orwell's life-long concern with liberalism, equality and decency in social and political life. It helps us to see *Animal Farm* as part of his continuing exploration of the way in which political reality impinges on everyday life.

In terms of the development of Orwell's narrative technique, with which he constantly experimented in order more fully to portray the ironies and ambiguities of the

---

political reality of our times, Animal Farm marks a major step forward. Orwell finally jettisons the trappings of the realistic novel which had confined him to a portrayal of the surface of life. Animal Farm is a major innovation in the sphere of the political novel - it is, paradoxically, both a documentary and an allegory. The oft neglected subtitle of Animal Farm, 'A Fairy Story', takes on significance in the light of Orwell's comment in his 1940 review of Thomas Mann's Royal Highness - he described it as "one of those eighteenth-century tales in which fairy story and social satire are combined". In fact, Animal Farm blends the contours of several kinds of narratives to arrive at a mode of story telling which is both realistic and symbolic.

Animal Farm is a unique synthesis of mock-utopia and bestiary. The first striking narrative mode employed in Animal Farm is the age-old form of the fable. Animal characters with human attributes form the most fascinating point of attraction in the book. The animals assemble at a meeting place, convey their feelings to one another, express their ambitions, hopes, their desires for an egalitarian future and organise a vibrant society. As Jeffrey Meyers says:

---

33. Peter Davison, op.cit, p.126.
political reality of our times, Animal Farm marks a major step forward. Orwell finally jettisons the trappings of the realistic novel which had confined him to a portrayal of the surface of life. Animal Farm is a major innovation in the sphere of the political novel - it is, paradoxically, both a documentary and an allegory. The oft neglected subtitle of Animal Farm, 'A Fairy Story', takes on significance in the light of Orwell's comment in his 1940 review of Thomas Mann's Royal Highness - he described it as "one of those eighteenth-century tales in which fairy story and social satire are combined". In fact, Animal Farm blends the contours of several kinds of narratives to arrive at a mode of story telling which is both realistic and symbolic.

Animal Farm is a unique synthesis of mock-utopia and bestiary. The first striking narrative mode employed in Animal Farm is the age-old form of the fable. Animal characters with human attributes form the most fascinating point of attraction in the book. The animals assemble at a meeting place, convey their feelings to one another, express their ambitions, hopes, their desires for an egahranian future and organise a vibrant society. As Jeffrey Meyers says:

33. Peter Davison, op.cit, p.126.
Orwell has fused his artistic and political purpose so well that the animals are completely convincing on the literal level. 34

The animal story reflects vividly the socio-political world of modern man. Orwell believes that:

The business of making people conscious of what is happening outside their own small circle is one of the major problems of our time, and a new literary technique will have to be evolved to meet it. 35

This beast fable conveys forcefully his ideas of the Russian myth, combining the ferocity of Swiftian satire with the joviality of the mock-epic and the liveliness of the beast fable. Orwell has been compared to Swift by Cyril Connolly 36.

Bertrand Russell, while comparing Orwell with Swift, says:

Orwell's animals, it is true, including even the noble horse, are not much like Swift's incarnations of frosty reason. But Orwell, like Swift after Queen Anne's death, belonged to a beaten party and both men travelled through defeat to despair. Both embodied their despair in biting and masterly satire. But while Swift's satire expresses universal and indiscriminating hate, Orwell's has always an undercurrent of kindness: he hates the enemies of those whom he loves, whereas Swift could only love (and that faintly) the enemies of those whom he hated. Swift's

34. Jeffrey Meyers, op. cit, p.131.
misanthropy, moreover, sprang mainly from thwarted ambition while Orwell's sprang from betrayal of generous ideals by their nominal advocates ... in neither respect did Orwell share Swift's defeats. 37

Orwell shares Swift's moral indignation and some of his pessimism, but unlike Swift, has not lost his faith in the basic decency of the common Man. Animal Farm exhibits both Orwell's socio-political involvement and artistic innovation.